THE LADY OF THE RIFLE

By

F. E. PENNY

the novelist who writes of
India—with its fascination
and mystery and romance

Novels by

F. E. PENNY

are mysterious and colourful

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By

F. E. PENNY

HODDER AND STOUGHTON

The characters in this book are entirely imaginary, and have no relation to any living person

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TO
THE MEMORY OF
A BELOVED SPORTING BROTHER

CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
I	A CONFUSION OF BAGGAGE	11
II	A CINGALESE NOBLEMAN	21
III	MAKING FRIENDS	34
IV	PASSENGERS FOR BURMA	52
V	SPORTING TALES	62
VI	A PERFECT HOST	74
VII	A PROPOSAL	88
VIII	PAULINE IN PURSUIT OF A TIGER	102
IX	THE BRIDE COMES TO CEYLON	112
X	LAND LEECHES	127
XI	SPORT VERSUS LOVE	138
XII	A SERIOUS BREACH	149
XIII	A WELCOME INVITATION	166
XIV	A CINGALESE CHIEFTAIN	178
XV	TO THE LOW COUNTRY	194
XVI	THE WATERHOLE	208
XVII	A NIGHT IN THE JUNGLE	219
XVIII	A STRANGE BEAST	235
XIX	A SHOCK	245
XX	THE MOODALIYAR SOLVES THE MYSTERY	259
XXI	PAULINE'S MIND IS RELIEVED	269
XXII	PRINCE IS NOT HAPPY	281
XXIII	IN SEARCH OF LONG-DOGS	295

CHARACTERS

PAULINE LAURISON, an enthusiastic sportswoman after big game.

LIONEL PRINCE, tea planter of Ceylon; keen hunting man.

MRS. MACDONALD, wife of a planter returning to Ceylon.

FLUFFIE, her daughter.

HARRY BURTON, Prince's assistant.

THE MOODALIYAR HONDARA, a Cingalese nobleman.

MISS ELIZABETH VIVYAN, a globe-trotter.

HOPKINS, a dogbreeder.

BIHOMA, a Cingalese shikaree.

SCENES

On board the s.s. *Lincolnshire*.

Ceylon, the Hills and Low country.

THE steamship, *Lincolnshire*, had cleared her decks of visitors and was slowly drawing out from the docks. The passengers' attention, no longer occupied by friends, was concentrated on an indiscriminate pile of luggage. The heap was composed of the light impedimenta intended for the cabins, and had been dumped there by the porters, who had carried it up from the cabs and cars that brought the passengers. Heavy luggage had been sent on ahead and was safely stowed in the hold or in the cabins according to directions.

With the assistance of the cabin stewards the recently arrived company picked out their property; rugs and cushions rolled into bundles, suit-cases, hat-boxes, hand-bags and brown paper parcels, large and small.

Pauline Laurison, holding a new cartridge-bag in one hand, was identifying other sundry properties. They were seized by her cabin steward and set aside to be transferred as soon as the collection was completed. She had so far found two large suit-cases on which were painted her initials, P.L., a tin box, and other various odds and ends necessary for travel. Two gun-cases were still missing to her great annoy-

ance, for she was positive that they were in the car that brought her to the docks.

She was alone, starting out for India to pay a visit to an uncle and aunt living in the Central Provinces. It was her ardent hope that she would have some big game shooting and perhaps bag her tiger.

She felt a hand laid gently but firmly on the leather strap of the cartridge-bag that she held. Her grip tightened. The bag was precious, more so than either of the suit-cases that held her clothes.

Pauline turned abruptly with a movement indicative of surprise and annoyance, and met a pair of deep grey eyes that looked her squarely in the face.

"Excuse me," said the owner. Tall as she was for a woman he topped her by three or four inches. "I think the bag you have in your hand is mine."

"I beg your pardon, it is mine," she replied with a touch of impatience. She was anxious to get her things together and he was hindering operations. "See the initials P.L. They stand for Pauline Laurison."

"I take them to be L.P., which stand for my name, Lionel Prince."

Pauline looked at the bag. He was right. In her haste and anxiety to find the rest of her property she had read the initials backwards.

"Sorry! My mistake!" she cried in some confusion. She relinquished the bag to the hand that had been laid upon it.

"Then this must be yours," said Prince, relieving his steward of a bag exactly similar and bearing the letters P.L. in the right order.

"Oh, thanks!" exclaimed Pauline with visible relief. "I am glad that is not missing, stolen or strayed. I was beginning to fear that it was lost."

"You need not be afraid of thieves now that we are disconnected with the dock. If there happened to be any on board when we were tied up, which is doubtful, they left with the visitors."

Pauline turned once more to the pile of luggage. He noted the anxiety with which she scanned the shapeless heap.

"Can I help you?" he asked. "What is it that you are looking for? A hat-box or a suit-case?"

"I am hunting for a couple of gun-cases," she replied.

He laughed as he answered.

"Now it is my turn to apologise. There's my man trying to carry off four! Two of them must be yours. I don't possess four."

He gave chase to the overburdened steward and caught him by the arm.

"Only two of those gun-cases belong to me," he said.

"But the letters, sir! You told me to collect anything marked L.P.," remonstrated the harassed man.

"L.P., yes, but not P.L. These are yours, I think," he continued, turning to Pauline. "I am so sorry these mistakes have occurred. We have evidently been to the

same firm for our outfit and the lettering has been done by the same hand."

Her brow cleared as anxiety vanished.

"I ought to have had a distinguishing mark added to my initials for easier identification," responded Pauline.

"I never thought of it," he remarked, struck by the suggestion.

"Nor did I when I was giving the order. Too late now."

With Prince's help their respective luggage was duly sorted and collected. The stewards were already on their way with their loads to the cabins. Pauline had found most of her property.

"I think that's all; but I can't tell until I see what has been brought down to the cabin," she said as she thanked him for his help.

"If anything else has strayed my way I'll send my man with it at once."

"That's very kind of you."

"What is the number of your cabin?" he asked.

They exchanged numbers, and went their ways. Even while they talked the big pile of luggage was reduced, bringing to light a much-travelled sun-topee case, bearing the letters L.P. on the lid; and a brand new tin box on its first voyage with P.L. on its side. There was no doubt that the initials were confusing.

No sooner is a big liner detached from her moorings

and disconnected with the wharf than her little world begins to revolve on its own axis. The ménage of the big floating hotel falls into an orderly line. The stewards know their work without any martialling. The officers and lascars pick up their duties as though there was no such thing as a port with all its distractions.

The only people on board who feel strange and not at home are the passengers. It takes a little time for them to settle down to the new conditions of their life. It leaves those who are accustomed to large rooms wondering at their own ingenuity in fitting into the small space allotted to serve as bed and dressing room for three whole weeks.

The minutes passed quickly for Pauline as she tidied and stowed away her luggage. She had never taken a sea trip before and it was all new. The cabin was small but there was only one other occupant besides herself. The stranger with whom she was to live in intimacy was apparently as tidily disposed as herself. She had already settled in and unpacked, appropriating no more of the hangers and racks than were her share.

Pauline was naturally inclined to be shy and reserved, never having had brothers or sisters; but she was ready to meet friendliness where she found it. Intimacy, however, was rarely attained with her and of "bosom friends" she had none.

Her cabin companion was a Miss Elizabeth Vivyan, a middle-aged and experienced traveller. Miss Vivyan's

quick eye detected the gun-cases although they were pushed almost out of sight under Pauline's berth.

"Sporting rifles," explained Pauline, noticing her glance.

"Your husband's?"

"My own. I am not married."

"Nor am I," responded Miss Vivyan.

"I hope to get some big game shooting in Central India," continued Pauline as she hung up her cartridge-bag on one of the hooks intended for her frocks.

"Your headquarters will probably be Hoshangabad. Hosh, we used to call it. It was always a great centre for sportsmen. I believe the shooting is as good as it was in my father's time. He was in the Civil Service."

Pauline glanced at her with awakening interest. Miss Vivyan did not look as if she had had practical experience of sport.

"Have you done any shooting?" she asked.

"No; sport is not in my line. I don't even play golf. But I have a vivid recollection as a child of seeing the elephants coming in with dead tigers slung across their backs. My father was a great sportsman."

"I suppose he killed a good many tigers."

"I really couldn't tell you how many. We had ten or a dozen fine skins lying about our house after he retired. He and my mother are both dead. Every now and then I drift back to India to see something of the land of my childhood."

Miss Vivyan glanced round. Pauline had still a good deal to do before she could bring order out of chaos. It would be a kindness to leave her in peace to grapple with her task. Miss Vivyan, who had been sitting on the sofa under the porthole, rose.

"I think I will go on deck. I have finished my unpacking. I'll leave you to get on with yours. You will be happier with me out of the way."

She took up a bulky workbag, her constant companion whether she was at home or abroad. It contained always a piece of work and a book. She passed through the curtained doorway and disappeared.

The afternoon seemed to Pauline to have flown. She had arrived on board at about half past three. She forgot to go to the saloon for afternoon tea. The dressing bell at half past six took her by surprise. She changed into a dinner dress. When the summons came for dinner, it was sounded by bugle-call; she drifted with a crowd of strangers to the saloon.

The saloon was brilliant with electric lights. A steward guided her to a table set for six. Strange faces met her glance on all sides. She knew no one. This fact did not trouble her, for since her childhood, even when her parents were alive, she had ploughed a lonely furrow.

Her father and mother had died some years ago leaving her the sole inheritor of their wealth. She had

always lived in the country and loved it with all her heart. London had no attraction for her. She had been able to follow the bent of her mind. This was sport and it took the form of shooting.

In this respect she had received every encouragement from her father, who made her his constant companion, never allowing her to go to school or stay away from the old home that he loved so dearly. He taught her early to handle a rifle and gun, and shoot rooks and small birds. He made a shooting range for her behind the stables. By the time she was sixteen she was to all intents and purposes a crack shot, although he was wise enough not to proclaim her as such.

Mr. Laurison possessed an estate in Norfolk. The shooting was strictly preserved but he was not fond of big "shoots" nor did he care to attend them. His delight was to go out with his daughter and perhaps one other gun, and to make a moderate bag.

Pauline had lived all her life in an old-fashioned atmosphere of sport. There were no hounds within easy reach to divert her from the birds. She carried her gun every day of her life until the close of the season. She existed for nothing else and was hedged round with it. It clung to her wherever she went.

There are some people who create their own mental atmospheres. It may be of melancholy, it may be of restlessness and strenuous work, or it may be of cheeriness. Whatever it is those who come into contact

with it are influenced in spite of their own temperaments.

No one could be long in Pauline's company without becoming aware of the fact that she lived for nothing else but her gun. For this reason she got on well with men as a rule, better perhaps with them than with women.

Dress had no attraction for her except for its utility. She took an intelligent interest in the arts without enthusiasm; enjoyed a good play with a sound plot and plenty of action, and could listen to music that had no eccentric measures in it.

Now at the age of twenty-five a desire had taken possession of her which strengthened till she could resist it no longer. It was for big game shooting.

An uncle living in the Central Provinces of India, a keen sportsman with whom she had done some covert-shooting when he was at home on leave, sent her a warm invitation to come out and try her luck in the great sal forests and in the lovely valleys of the rivers, the Narbudda and its tributaries. Her aunt added her word of persuasion and promised the gaieties of an up-country station.

It needed no more to turn the scale. Pauline furnished herself with the necessary outfit and found herself on the way to the promised happy hunting ground.

She was interested in Lionel Prince, the man whose luggage had been confused with her own. She

wondered what his destination was. Some country where he would find big game or he would not be taking out guns. She glanced round the saloon but could not see him. Perhaps he was late, held up by having to stow away his luggage with less accommodating companions than Miss Vivyan. People continued to straggle in, appearing lost and uncertain until they were captured by the stewards and guided to the seats allotted to them. The saloon was large. It was not an easy matter to see all over it from any one position.

The number of people who streamed into the saloon surprised her. She wondered if she would have to make their acquaintance. The thought dismayed her. She was not accustomed to crowds. She consoled herself with the assurance that she need not know one of them unless she chose.

A voice at her elbow broke her train of conjecture.

"Is this your first voyage to the East?" asked her neighbour, a man in evening dress who seemed quite at home. Except for him and herself the table which seated six was empty. It was a pleasant voice.

She glanced round and her eyes encountered the smiling gaze of a handsome clean-shaven man between thirty and forty.

"It is," she replied.

"You have a treat before you."

"Have I? Is there so much to see?"

"Not only to see, but to feel and enjoy. The East stirs one in many strange ways."

"You know it, then?"

"Of course!" he replied, as much as to say that his appearance should tell her that. "I am not English."

"I thought you were a European."

She was too well-bred to ask personal questions. She wondered if he belonged to India or to Burma. He was not offended by her remark. On the contrary he may have been flattered at having been taken for a man of the West although the blood of kings ran in his veins. He satisfied her curiosity by saying:

"I am a Cingalese, Ceylon bred and born; and I am proud of the fact. Ceylon! The rich Taprobane or the Lanka of the ancient voyagers! The loveliest Isle in the East."

His words pleased her. His warm patriotism roused her sympathy.

"My horizon is enlarging. I thought India was the chief point of interest in the East. Now Ceylon is coming into the picture."

He took out a card-case and laid a card on the table by her side.

"The Muddaliyar, Hondara."

She read out his name hesitating over the unfamiliar term. He smiled at her pronunciation.

"Every foreigner stumbles over the word," he said.

"What does Mudda—Mudda——" she paused.

"Try Mood'leeyar," he said.

"The Moodaliyar," she repeated getting it correctly.

"It is a title, not a name. Hondara is one of a string of names given to me by my parents. I chose it as being the least difficult for my western friends to pronounce."

She was interested.

"I have never heard of it before," she said. "I ought to apologise for my ignorance."

"Not at all! The tea planters and the Civil Service people know it; but I doubt if men in Great Britain who have nothing to do with the East have even heard it."

"Do tell me, if you don't mind, about the Moodaliyars."

"They are Cingalese chieftains, princes they would be called in Europe; Maharajahs in India. As such they are received by Royalty in England."

"Where does the Moodaliyar live when he is at home?"

"On his estates. He possesses by inheritance mountains, forests, rivers, paddylands and villages. Next to the Moodaliyar in rank comes the Mohandiram." He pronounced it Mo-hun-deram.

"There are many other classes of inferior rank——"

Pauline was listening. At the same time her glance wandered now and then. She had made a discovery. Prince was seated at a table on the other side of the saloon. The table was full. He was laughing and talking as though he had met with some old friends, which was the case. He too had glanced round on entering and had caught sight of Pauline seated by the Cingalese. She became conscious that her companion had ceased speaking.

He stopped suddenly, observing that her attention had wandered. With the swift intuition of the Oriental he dropped a subject that seemed no longer to attract his listener and became silent.

"I am intensely interested," she said. "It is all news to me."

Still he did not speak or make any effort to pick up

the thread of the conversation. She would not allow the silence to last but broke it by speaking of herself.

"I ought in return for your card to give you one of mine. I haven't one at this moment," she said. "I am Miss Pauline Laurison."

"Are you getting off at Colombo?" he asked.

"I am crossing over to India."

She told him about her uncle.

"He is in the Civil Service and near the end of his service."

"He would be called a Government Agent in Ceylon, a better title than Collector or Commissioner to my mind; but that is a matter of opinion," he concluded with a smile at himself for presuming to criticise the Government under which he lived.

They talked sport and big game shooting till the people were leaving their seats. No one lingered over dessert. Coffee was served quickly. The stewards were glad to get rid of the company. It meant that the washing up could be sooner done and the weary men released from their duties.

Pauline rose to follow with the crowd. Hondara also rose but as soon as she had moved away he sat down to finish the peach he had taken.

He looked after the tall figure with a keen eye that lost nothing. Decision, nerve, determination were expressed in every line. She was a marked contrast to the gentle soft women of his own nation. On the other

hand she was not like the tennis-playing, dancing English girls with whom he came in contact in his frequent visits to England. He had heard of the modern sportswoman of the West. Miss Laurison was the first of her class that he had met.

At the top of the companion stairs she was greeted by Lionel Prince.

"I was waiting for you," he said. "I have found your chair marked P.L. It can only be yours. It was placed next to mine. The deck quarter-master like the stewards seems determined to confuse our initials."

"Where is it?"

"I have left it where I found it. Come and see if you are satisfied. You may like a more sheltered corner."

The October twilight still lingered in the sky. There was an awning overhead on deck but the sides were open. The day had been warm, more like September than October. Soft pastel shades of colour still lingered in the sky. They were reflected on the smooth river and illuminated the level stretches of grass and mud that formed the low-lying banks of the Thames. In the far distance the wind-blown trees were becoming dark on the horizon.

"Are you afraid of sitting on deck?" Prince asked.

"Not at all," she replied readily.

He led the way towards a group of chairs. A voice out of the shadow of the awning hailed him.

"Mr. Prince! will you come and join us? Your chair is here."

"Thanks!" he replied. "I am bringing Miss Laurison." He turned to Pauline: "This is an old friend, Mrs. Macdonald. She is my neighbour in Ceylon."

"Come and sit down," repeated Mrs. Macdonald with the friendliness that marks the old traveller. "Here's your chair, Miss Laurison. I have had it placed next to mine. Are you stopping with anyone in Ceylon?"

Pauline gave an account of herself and explained where she was going, adding the usual words:

"I hope to get some big game shooting."

"What are you going to shoot?" asked Florence Macdonald, a girl of eighteen, just released from school. She was full of excitement at the thought of returning to the land of her birth which she had not seen for ten years.

"Tigers, of course," replied Pauline with a smile.

"How fearsome!" exclaimed Fluffie as she was known among her friends and relatives. "I should be terrified."

"If you come to Ceylon, Miss Laurison, I am afraid we can't introduce you to tigers," said Mrs. Macdonald. "We have nothing bigger than a leopard."

"Failing a tiger I should not despise a leopard," replied Pauline.

"You will bag your tiger all right in the Central

Provinces," remarked Prince. "I envy you your luck," he added after a short pause.

"I made sure that you were on the same track as myself when I saw your gun-cases," said Pauline.

"I wish that it might be so, but I have had my holiday and am due back on the estate in Ceylon in a month's time."

"May I ask whose estate?"

"My own. While I have been at home my assistant, Harry Burton, has been running it for me. He wants to take a short holiday and he deserves it." He turned to Mrs. Macdonald. "Burton is thinking of coming back to me after he has had a couple of months. He wants to run over to Bangalore to see a brother in the Artillery there."

"You couldn't do better than take him on permanently; my husband says he has the making of a good planter in him. I suppose he will live with you."

"I think of building him a bungalow near the factory. I am going to open out that bit of jungle at the top of the estate. I am sure I should get a high grade of tea from it."

They talked of tea, crops, sales and prices. Pauline sat silent, her eyes on the darkening horizon just visible over the taffrail, her thoughts on her old home in Norfolk.

Pheasant-shooting had just begun, and this was the first time she had missed taking a part in it. She was

not given to useless regret and had no real wish to be back in her well-stocked coverts. She had let the place to an appreciative friend who would take care of house, garden and shooting as if they were his own.

Mrs. Macdonald and Prince had left the subject of tea and were discussing the hounds. His pack was the apple of his eye, the one object, after the welfare of the estate, for which he lived. The words deer and sambur attracted Pauline's attention and she asked how they took the deer.

"Up-country we hunt them with a pack of mixed hounds," he replied.

"Isn't it rough going for the horses?"

"We don't use horses; we follow on foot. It is the finest sport in the world. The planters started it years ago when they first opened the country for coffee. They called it elk-hunting, a misnomer; the quarry is the sambur, the finest of the deer tribe."

"Poor things!" said Fluffie, who was sitting by her mother. "It is a shame to set the dogs——"

"Dogs! dogs!" cried Prince. "I'm shocked! What will your father say if he hears his daughter calling the hounds dogs?"

"Fluffie has a good deal to learn, Mr. Prince," said her mother, smiling at her.

"We will soon teach her," observed Prince. He remembered the pretty girl as a yellow-haired child devoted to an Irish terrier called Molly, long since

gonethe way of all pets. Fluffie was taken to England soon after Prince came out to the country.

"I think you said that they were foxhounds. It must be difficult to keep up with them on foot."

"As a rule the nature of the jungle holds them up and makes the pace slow. Now and then they manage to get away from us if the stag is not killed before it reaches the low country."

"Do they pull it down?"

"Not without assistance. We use a mixed pack with a few stag- and boarhounds called seizers."

At the end of half an hour Mrs. Macdonald rose from her chair. The electric bulbs lighted up the deck. The evening was mild, but she was afraid of the night air that blew in from the estuary.

"Come along, Fluffie. Let's go down to the saloon where we can find a table. I want a game of patience. Good night, everybody."

She and her daughter drifted away. Other people were following her example, some going to the music-room, the men mostly to the smoking-saloon where bridge tables were to be found.

Lionel Prince remained seated. He lighted another cigarette.

"Don't let me keep you if you want to play bridge," said Pauline a little diffidently. She was unfamiliar with the curious independence of life on board ship where no one is host or hostess. "I shall remain here

a little longer. It is a lovely evening for this time of the year."

"I am in no hurry to let myself in for cards. Must see what my probable partners are like first," he replied.

"Did you find all your luggage?"

"Everything, thanks. Odd that our property should have been mixed up as it was."

"It was because we had both bought at the same stores."

"Who recommended you to go there?" he asked.

"My uncle, Mr. Hayes."

"More strange still that we should have been attracted by the same class of outfit."

"I don't know that it is surprising," she replied. "All sportsmen look for lightness and handiness in equipment."

"What kind of rifles are you taking out?" he inquired.

They discussed the qualities of their guns as parents might have discussed the merits of their respective children. The words "hammerless", "bore", "trajectory", "weight", "single and double barrels" occurred as they talked, and they criticised the various makers with an intimate knowledge which as far as he was concerned astonished him.

Pauline glanced at her watch. It was past ten o'clock. She rose from her deck chair.

"How the time flies when I am on my favourite

subject!" she said apologetically. She had a sudden misgiving that she had detained him, perhaps against his will and he had been too polite to show it.

"It has been a most interesting talk," he replied, and his words rang true. "We haven't half exhausted the subject."

Pauline's courage returned.

"I have a book I must show you. It is on big game shooting. I should like to have your opinion on it."

"Bring it on deck to-morrow."

"I will. Good night, Mr. Prince."

With a friendly response he turned away in the direction of the smoking-room. He did not offer her his hand. She concluded that this was the custom on board ship. He must know, for he had made several passages in his time between England and Ceylon.

She went to her cabin. The ship was still in smooth water and free from unsteadiness. On her way she glanced in at the saloon. A few passengers were still visible playing patience, reading or writing. The majority, however, had retired, including Mrs. Macdonald and Fluffie.

Pauline's cabin companion was already in her berth. She was reading.

"Cold on deck, isn't it?" she asked.

"Not too much so for me. I love the open air," replied Pauline.

"It's all right if you don't want to read or work. I'm

a great reader," said Miss Vivyan. "I shall be reading till eleven o'clock. I hope you won't mind."

"Not a bit. I read a good deal myself."

"What's your particular fancy in subjects?"

"Sport. I like a good novel with plenty of action. I can't stand sloppy introspective stuff, and I hate anything that's tragic and melancholy."

"I may as well confess at once that my taste is for detective stories," said Miss Vivyan. "I delight in mysterious murders, sexual entanglements and any sort of crime. Rotten choice, I know! But nothing else holds me."

Pauline could not help smiling. The little lady wrapped in a brilliant kimono and luxuriantly tucked up in a soft fur rug, looked more like a reader of sedate history and biography than a student of the immoral criminology of fiction. Miss Vivyan turned on her side and straightway immersed herself in her book.

"The girl has just disappeared," she said looking back a page or two to make sure of her facts. "I think I can guess where she is but I am not at all certain. I hope I shall find out before I go to sleep."

"Take a peep at the end and see," suggested Pauline.

"Oh, Miss Laurison! that would be cheating! I never look at the end."

"But what if it keeps you awake. Suspense is so bad for the nerves I am told."

"If I am tempted, I put a paper clip with a good

strong grip in it, on the last three or four chapters. I am afraid I shall want the clip on this book. I had better put it on at once. It will be safer."

She thrust her hand into a bag that hung from the rack by her side and brought out a formidable wire slide. She slipped it over the end of the book.

"There! that makes it safe!" she said.

"What do you do when you meet people who have read the books and will insist on telling you the plot?"

"I want to kill them! I don't do it because, as Mark Twain says, you don't know what to do with the dead bodies."

THE next morning they were in the Channel. The weather had changed. It was cold and raw. Chill October had set in. Experienced travellers who were good sailors had no fault to find with the bracing sea air. The motion of the ship was perceptible but not uncomfortable.

Those who were afloat for the first time were curiously sensitive to the movement. Some gave up at once. Others were not long in adapting themselves to the new conditions. It was a very pleasant surprise and a matter of self-congratulation when the good sailors found that they were free from giddiness, headache and squeamishness.

The more unfortunate refused food. Their one desire was to be left in peace to sleep it off. They pulled their warm travelling rugs up to their ears, turned on their pillows and closed their eyes.

Such was the condition of Elizabeth Vivyan in spite of the fact that this was by no means her first experience of the sea. Her book was tossed into the rack. No need for a clip to keep her forcibly from looking for the ultimate fate of her murderer and breaker of the laws.

She had lost all interest for the time being in the characters.

Pauline occupied the upper berth. A dash of water at the closed port hole awoke her. She looked over the side of her berth and caught sight of Miss Vivyan's white face and closed eyes. Then she glanced at her clothes which she had hung upon the pegs where she had slung the cartridge-bag. They were swaying gently to and fro. Her slippers on the floor were inclined to make excursions "on their own". She put out her hand to steady herself and slipped out of her berth.

"Feeling all right?" asked her companion in a wan feeble voice.

"Yes, thanks; it's cold though."

"Lucky woman!" said Miss Vivyan burrowing still deeper in her rug.

The stewardess hearing voices put her head in through the curtain of the doorway.

"Bath, Miss?"

"Yes, please, if it's hot. Can't face a cold tub this morning."

"A cup of tea first," recommended the stewardess handing her a hot cup of tea with a couple of biscuits in the saucer.

Presently Pauline was revelling in a steaming bath of sea water such as is unattainable on land.

There were many vacant seats at the breakfast-tables. Pauline glanced across towards Mrs. Macdonald's

table. It was empty. Even Prince had not turned up, which surprised her. Just as she took her seat the Moodaliyar appeared, a smile of welcome on his handsome olive face.

"Congratulations! Miss Laurison!" were his first words.

"For what?" she asked.

"For having found your sea-legs. You are going to prove a good sailor."

"Wait till we have a real storm, one of the cyclones I have heard so much about but have never seen."

"I don't think you need be afraid. Immunity from sea-sickness I look upon as an inherited gift for which one cannot be too thankful. No power of will can overcome it if it is there. You and I may count ourselves lucky."

"Do you know Mr. Prince?" she asked presently.

"Yes; we're old acquaintances."

"He is a great sportsman I understand."

"One of our greatest. Have you met him before?"

"We made acquaintance yesterday in a curious manner. His initials are L.P. Mine are P.L. Our luggage got mixed and there was a little confusion over it."

She described what happened. Also that she had learnt that he possessed a pack of hounds.

"Do you hunt?" she asked.

"Very rarely. I don't live near enough to the country that they hunt."

"But you are fond of sport, surely?"

"My tastes lie in another direction. I play polo and do a lot of racing. I have a stud farm on my estate near Kandy. I have made no end of experiments with Arabs and Walers and the hardy little Burmese ponies."

"Have you been successful?" she asked. He interested her. He was so enthusiastic.

"I flatter myself that I have improved the breed of polo ponies anyway as far as India and Burma are concerned. We play a much harder and faster game than the Burmese."

He went on to explain the different points that were desirable in the ponies and how difficult it was to get everything you wanted.

"Have you seen much polo in England?" he asked.

"I haven't been in the way of it. I have lived in Norfolk out of reach of Ranelagh and Hurlingham. Of course I might have made a point of going up to town and seeing something of it if I had been tempted."

"You preferred fox-hunting and the pheasants and partridges."

"Pheasant- and partridge-shooting has so far satisfied me. It is the chief sport of the Eastern counties."

Hondara was a good listener as well as talker. It interested him to hear of the bags that were made.

"I have had a little experience of that sort of thing.

I stayed with a friend and he gave me some excellent shooting."

He mentioned the name of a large landowner, known by reputation to Pauline.

"You were in good hands and you must have had some hunting as well. He has two good packs within reach of his place."

"Are you going up on deck?" he asked when breakfast was over.

"If it is possible. I should love to have a little fresh air if it is not too wet."

"The awnings are all out and you will be protected from the wind and rain. If you will put on your fur coat I will find a sheltered corner where you will be dry and comfortable."

He waited while she went to her cabin for her coat and rug. She found Miss Vivyan still in her berth, wan and unhappy but being well looked after by the stewardess.

Pauline's deck chair was stacked away with others by a tidy quartermaster who reckoned on the greater number of the passengers being confined to their cabins while the squally autumn weather continued.

"Is there anything else I can do for you?" asked the Moodaliyar.

"Nothing thanks. I have a book. This is very nice," she replied with gratitude.

"Put up your umbrella if you feel disinclined to talk."

"Is that how one secures privacy?" she replied with a smile. "Thank you so much for the hint."

He left her. She wondered how he, an Oriental, had acquired his knowledge of how to render his services so acceptably. Good birth, an English public school, the University and a decent circle of friends had made him what he was without destroying his nationality.

Pauline had provided herself with some knitting—she was not an expert needle-woman—and a novel. In her knitting bag she had put the book on big game shooting which she was anxious to discuss with Prince.

Now and then she glanced along the decks. Several people who had not been able to face the breakfast-table had come up for fresh air. They were taking exercise with a dermination to conquer their desire to lie down and sleep. Others were sitting like herself wrapped in furs in sheltered places. She saw nothing of Prince. The throbbing of the engines and the swish of the water as the ship cut her way through were new and pleasant sensations which she enjoyed.

About noon the sun struggled through the rain clouds. She seized the opportunity to pace the deck and get beyond the awnings into the open. Here and there she was greeted by passengers in passing but no one stopped to talk.

It was early days for the mixed company of total strangers to be genial. They were mostly feeling the reaction of the recent parting with friends and family

and were disinclined for conversation with strangers.

Mrs. Macdonald and her daughter were nowhere to be seen. Pauline glanced into the music-room. There she found Miss Vivyan wrapped in furs like herself and complaining of the cold.

"You want a little exercise," said Pauline. "Come for a turn on deck. It isn't half bad, much better than it looks."

Miss Vivyan shook her head.

"I know my limitations at my age, and I am taking no risks. If I move about I shall be ill."

She left her once more deep in her book. The clip was firmly fixed on the last chapters, preventing any surreptitious glances at the end on the part of the reader. Miss Vivyan was recovering.

Pauline went down to lunch. She had the table to herself. Many seats were vacant. She wondered if the Moodaliyar had succumbed. Although the rain had ceased the sea was choppy and the ship still inclined to be lively.

At dinner she found Hondara looking fit and well. He welcomed her with a smile. She was glad to see him. The day had been long.

"I'm afraid you've had a dull time," he said.

"Call it quiet. I am never dull. And you? You were not at lunch."

"Deep in bridge. We sent the steward for biscuits and whisky and sodas and played on till four o'clock."

"What about exercise?"

"I had a game of quoits on the lower deck. You can't get much exercise on board ship."

"That's so. Tramping up and down the deck is not like a walk across the fields with dog and gun."

"I shall miss my morning gallops," he rejoined.

Conversation did not flag during dinner nor at the subsequent meals they took together.

The weather moderated the next day and the passengers reappeared with appetites sharpened by their enforced absence. The kindliness of the Bay of Biscay compensated for the discomforts of the Channel. The sun shone on the blue waters of the Atlantic as if the season had slipped back a month.

Mrs. Macdonald with Fluffie joined Pauline on deck. Elizabeth, never without her mystery novel, found a place in the little circle. Two of Mrs. Macdonald's friends returning to Ceylon had discovered her and asked if they might bring up their chairs. Prince had already established himself as one of them. He drew his chair into the circle with a collective greeting for all.

"Good morning, Mr. Prince. Are you all right again?" asked Mrs. Macdonald.

"Have you been ill?" asked Pauline with sudden concern.

Before he could reply Fluffie had burst in.

"Oh! were you sea-sick?" she cried full of sympathy for a fellow sufferer. Without waiting for a reply she

continued: "Poor you! I was dreadfully ill. The ship tossed about till I thought it was going to fall over."

Prince looked at her with a twinkle in his eye.

"You don't mean to say that you felt any movement, Fluffie?" he said seriously. "The ship was as steady as a rock."

"Oh! didn't I feel it! I rolled about all anyhow and ——"

Her mother intervened, afraid of what her schoolgirl daughter might say next.

"The less said about your indisposition the better. I think that the big box of chocolates your auntie gave you had as much to do with it as the weather and the rolling of the ship."

There was a laugh and someone suggested that she might hand round the box if there were any left.

"They are all finished," she confessed. "You see, I had nothing to do while I was lying in my berth and there weren't half as many as you would think from the look of the box."

Pauline's eyes were on Prince with inquiry. He answered the unspoken question.

"No, I haven't been over-eating myself on chocolates like Fluffie. I've had a villainous cold."

"My fault for keeping you up on deck so late!" she cried.

"Not at all; the evening was beautifully warm. A ship is full of draughts as soon as it begins to move and

you can't get away from them. When we are further south we shall need every bit of air that is to be had, but at present we are getting a little too much of a good thing."

"I've been longing to show you my book," said Pauline as the little company settled down. She drew the precious volume out of her bag and handed it to him.

"I know it but I don't possess it," he said, turning over the leaves as if he was familiar with it. "It's first-rate and the author understands his subject."

He stopped at the outline drawing of a sambur. Pauline leaned towards him, her eyes on the page.

"Now if you were shooting," she asked, "where exactly would you aim?"

"We don't shoot sambur in Ceylon," he observed before replying to her question.

"What about the low country, Mr. Prince?" said Mrs. Macdonald, who had caught the words. "You can't use hounds except in the hills."

"Of course, in the low country it is a different matter," he admitted. "If you want deer's meat there you must use the rifle. You can't get it in any other way."

"How do you kill up-country?" asked Pauline.

"With the knife. When the stag is exhausted, too winded to run farther, it comes to bay. It turns and faces the hounds. The huntsman seizes it by the brow antler and plunges the knife in here," he said, putting

his finger on the picture. "It is about six inches behind the forearm. The knife reaches the heart and death is instantaneous."

"As it should be with the bullet," observed Pauline. "I suppose in shooting you would aim at the same spot."

"It would depend entirely upon where you were standing when you fired and the position of the stag."

"Do you stalk the deer in the low country?" she asked.

"The jungle is too thick to allow of stalking such as is done in Scotland where the country is bare. The dense undergrowth gives the hunter no chance of seeing an animal even if it is within fifty feet of him."

"How do you come up with the game when you want to shoot?" she asked.

"You lie up near a waterhole at night. It needs a moon. The shooting is not easy even with a full moon."

"What a shame!" cried Fluffie, bursting into the conversation. Her eyes shone with indignation. "Fancy killing the poor thirsty things as they come to drink!"

"I am afraid you will never make a sportswoman, Fluffie," remarked Prince with an amused smile. "Have you ever fired a rifle?"

"Never! and I don't intend to fire one if this is what it leads to! It is most cruel to kill anything, even if it is only a white butterfly."

"What about the beef and mutton, the chicken and fish you help to devour at lunch and dinner? They have to be killed before you eat them."

"How can you be so horrid! One doesn't think of the sheep and fowls in that way. They are different."

"In what way?"

"They're not wild."

Prince laughed outright. Even her mother smiled.

"I see," he said. "We must draw a line between wild and tame. Upon my word I can't see any difference in cutting the throat of a sheep and in sticking a sambur. On the whole the sambur has the best of it. The sheep can't possibly escape its fate. The stag, if it has not over-eaten itself, has an excellent chance of out-running the hounds. It knows the forest as well as we know our gardens. As often as not it shows the hounds a clean pair of heels."

Fluffie was not convinced. Her large eyes were fixed upon him with strong disapproval.

"You and Pauline are nothing better than butchers, both of you."

Prince turned to her mother with a gravity that did not deceive her.

"This is very serious, Mrs. Macdonald. I am afraid your husband will be compelled by his daughter to give up hunting. What will you do with him when he sees us going off to the Horton Plains with the hounds and

leaving him behind? He will be tearing his hair in rage and despair."

"Fluffie will have to be converted. I shall hand her over to you, Mr. Prince."

"Shall I be allowed to put her in the corner?"

"The corner!" repeated Fluffie with increased indignation. "You are simply horrid and I shall not speak to you again."

She ran off to prance round the deck and cool her flushed cheeks over the taffrail.

Prince turned to Pauline and they resumed the study of the book, discussing the vulnerable points in each animal. It was a subject that they found absorbing.

"There is one thing to be remembered," he said. "If you want good trophies you must avoid knocking the heads about."

"Do you know the Central Provinces?" she asked.

"Never had the chance of going there. From all accounts it's one of the finest districts for sport in India." There was a touch of unconscious envy in his tone. "The rivers are larger than ours. They have grassy banks and in dry weather long stretches of sand. Where the forests give place to glades and pasturage the country is like a magnificent park. There are also hills that are covered with coarse grass and studded with boulders and scrubby trees, the kind of place beloved by the cat tribe. I fancy that it is in some such

country that you will bag your tiger. Don't be tempted to go on foot; too fatiguing."

It was on the tip of his tongue to add: "and too dangerous"; but he thought better of it. Young sportsmen out for the first time with no previous experience are attracted by the word dangerous. It is some time before they regard it as a serious warning.

"My uncle uses elephants," she reminded him.

"Shooting from a howdah is rather like shooting from a balcony. However I daresay Mr. Hayes will put you wise."

"He ought to be able to do so. He has been many years in India and his time is nearly up."

"Will you do me a favour, Miss Laurison?" asked Prince.

"With pleasure."

"I should like to see your rifles."

"We will have a display after lunch in the saloon when the tables have been cleared. You must bring yours as well."

The gun-cases were produced as soon as there was room for them. After the manner of sportsmen there was much handling of the rifles and their various merits were discussed.

Pauline ran her left hand along the barrel and hugged the stock to her shoulder. She bent her head and looked along the sights. Prince noticed that she handled her rifle in workmanlike style. He watched her movements

with warm approval. She was no novice he concluded. Fluffie had joined them. In spite of her horror at lethal weapons she was fascinated by the sight of the guns.

"Are they loaded, Miss Laurison?" she asked.

"No, indeed! there will be time enough for that when I start tiger-hunting."

"You pour gunpowder in at the end, don't you?"

Pauline made no reply. The girl was too silly for words. Prince smiled in amusement as he might have smiled at an irresponsible flapper. Fluffie was a pretty girl of eighteen with untouched lips and cheeks. Even her nose was innocent of powder. She was quite unconscious of her good looks and equally unaware of her childishness. Such girls are forgiven much by the men they amuse. Prince took up one of his rifles.

"Look here, Fluffie; let me show you how to handle a gun. It's what every woman ought to know who comes out to the East."

She shrank from the rifle with a timidity that made Pauline feel as if she could shake her.

"You are to do as I tell you," continued Prince. "I can't have your father's daughter gun-shy like a pariah pup."

He put the rifle in her grip, placing her hands where they should be and pressing the stock into her shoulder.

"See how comfortably it fits in without hurting you anywhere. Hold it tight."

"Sure it won't go off?"

"How can it go off when there's no cartridge in it, little silly! You can play with an unloaded gun as if it was a baby; take it to bed with you if you like."

"Ooh! I wouldn't like to do that!" she cried, making an effort to be serious as he seemed to wish her to be and to follow his directions.

"That's better! Bring it up a little higher and bend your head down so that you can run your eye along the barrel."

He showed her how to look at the sights and get them in line with an object he pointed out at the end of the saloon.

"But the gun wobbles about of its own accord as if it was alive," she cried, handing it to him in despair.

He carried it up to his own shoulder, moved the rifle apparently to all points till he had secured his aim.

"Now you try to find the objective in the same way."

He put it back in her grip passing his arm round her.

"Splendid! I've got it! No! Now I've lost it!"

"Grip it tighter! Grip it as if it was the dearest thing in the world!" he cried.

By this time she was practically in his arms, his left hand over hers under the barrel, his right clasping her fingers to steady them on to the trigger.

Fluffie, finding herself the centre of his attention, was enjoying herself immensely. This lesson in the manipulation of a gun was new and exhilarating.

While it was proceeding Pauline was using a soft silk handkerchief, removing all fingermarks before repacking her precious gun-cases. Thus occupied she paid no attention to the "child" who was in her opinion being encouraged to babble foolishly after the manner of an ignorant babe when something was being exhibited that was beyond its comprehension.

Prince was kind and indulgent to the daughter of his old friend, more so than she felt she would have been. There was a difference of seven years between herself and Fluffie. She was twenty-five. Fluffie was only eighteen. One was a woman in her twenties. The other was a girl in her teens. Never again would the seven years seem such a gap to either of them as just at that period.

Pauline would remain a young woman with her formed tastes, her mental atmosphere and decisive character. The other would get rid of her callowness and enter the twenties, a decade wherein all women looked alike and might be credited with a knowledge of the world they moved in.

She watched the expert sportsman and his pupil and the futile efforts made to carry out his instructions. Pauline was conscious of a growing impatience at the feeble response. Long before she was eighteen she was familiar with a rook rifle and expert in its use, whether she potted a thrush in the raspberry canes or smashed

her dozen empty bottles on the miniature shooting range.

She locked her gun-cases, picked them up and carried them to the cabin. When she returned Prince had released Fluffie and was occupied in putting his rifles back in their cases. He was observing the same care that Pauline had shown, lingering over the work with enjoyment. He was chaffing Fluffie at the same time.

"We shall make a sportsman of you yet, Fluffie, and you shall have the honour of 'sticking' a stag one day."

"Never, Mr. Prince, never!" she cried as she ran off to find her mother.

At Marseilles they were joined by a large contingent of passengers for Burma. The tables in the saloon filled up, including Pauline's. She and the Moodaliyar no longer had it to themselves. The newcomers were a pleasant crowd and disposed to be sociable and friendly.

The Moodaliyar was not altogether a stranger to them. He had a popularity as well as a reputation, Pauline discovered, and he was recognised as a racing celebrity of some standing. To a few of them he was known personally and through them he was introduced to the rest who seemed glad of the opportunity of meeting him.

The conversation was chiefly about polo, racing and horses. She found it interesting. Hondara with his instinctive courtesy managed to include her in it and make it intelligible although she had never been to any races. Two of the men had their wives with them, kind-hearted women who stood on no ceremony.

It was not long, however, before her own particular atmosphere was sensed. The man on her left struck a note of sympathy by the mention of big game in

Burma. He was in a large timber trading company and his work took him to the forests far away from the Civil and Military stations for which most of the passengers were bound. He was not indifferent to the national game of the Burmese nor did he object to a flutter on the race-course. But it was not often that he could get to the scene of action, the polo ground on the open maidan and the well-kept level race-course. He lived in the depths of the jungle, and as the trees fell before the axes of the Company, he moved with his woodmen and his elephants deeper still into the forests.

His tales of tiger-shooting thrilled her. In the wild regions in which his work lay, tigers were not only common but troublesome. They interfered with his labour staff carrying off camp-followers when they went for water outside the camp or for dry firewood wherewith to cook the men's meals. Dry firewood is not easy to find in a damp climate that renders dead wood rotten and mushy.

The grass of the open spaces was long and rank, giving excellent cover to a creature with the habits of a cat. Often the only indication of the presence of a tiger was the irregular movement of the grass as it pushed its way through, stalking by the aid of its nose a stag or a human being. A guess had to be made as to the position of its head, the guide being the manner in which the grass was stirred. After the shot there was infinite danger in following the beast up. If it was only

wounded it would mean that the hunted became in its turn the hunter.

All this was of great interest to Pauline. The hunter and the fisherman as well as the golf player need an intelligent and sympathetic listener or their tales fall flat. Pauline was all a man could desire in the way of an audience. There was mutual regret when the meal was ended and the conversation was broken off. The men trooped away to the smoking-room; the women formed their own party on deck and, although by no means exclusive, were sufficient unto themselves.

The Moodaliyar was looked upon as a welcome addition to the company. Not only was he an authority on racing in the East but he had inside knowledge that made his tips valuable. He was generous with his information, not being a betting man himself. He was quite ready to give his opinion on the points of a horse, and tell them honestly what he knew about it, its past history, and what it promised for the future.

Another thing that made him popular was his readiness to join in a game of cards. He would play for any stakes they liked to name. He had a clear level head, was a good player, and a cheerful loser if the luck went against him.

Pauline usually left the table after they had departed. She made her way to the upper deck where she found her Ceylon friends. Prince came and went as the spirit moved him. He did not object to a game of bridge

now and then but lengthy sittings at the card table bored him.

With the advent of the Marseilles contingent those who had come on board at Tilbury were drawn together and felt like old friends, although they had only known each other a week. Reserve and constraint had worn off and they were more or less intimate.

Prince and Pauline had by no means exhausted their favourite subject. Sport still held them, and was likely to last to the end of the voyage if not longer.

It was the second day out from Marseilles. The sea was a pale sky-blue with more light in it than depth of colour, and the ship was no longer inclined "to fall over" as Fluffie called the liveliness in the Channel. They had breakfasted and were gathered as usual on deck. Miss Vivyan's novel, duly under the control of paper clips, lay on her lap. Mrs. Macdonald's needle was busy and Pauline was knitting a jumper in an eccentric pattern, a garment suggestive of autumn tints of the British woods.

"I have come across a man among the Burma passengers who ought to interest you, Miss Laurison," said Prince, pulling up his chair by the side of Pauline, a favourite practice of his.

"Who is he?"

"His name is Reginald Ayton."

"He sits next to me at table and I have already discovered him," replied Pauline.

"A great tiger-slayer. He has killed more tigers than any man I know in the East."

"I gathered that he had done very well."

"Another horrid butcher!" said Fluffie, snapping her eyes as was her way when indignation was beginning to rise.

"You can't call a man who kills a tiger, a butcher," expostulated Prince.

"If he goes into the jungle and shoots the tiger in its den, I do."

"But if the tiger is carrying off a dear plump little brown baby belonging to the waterwoman, what about shooting it then?"

"I should call it an exceptional case; but it doesn't often happen."

"I am afraid it does. Most of Ayton's tigers have been man-eaters of the worst description."

"Poor things! I suppose they get too old to catch deer!"

Pauline put down her work. Rising abruptly she wandered off as if to take a turn along the deck. In reality she had a sudden craving to be out of earshot. At the same time she was ashamed of herself for allowing her anger to rise. Was Fluffie really a fool? or did she put on a childish simplicity thinking that it would attract?

The girl was too young to be adopting poses that some men might find alluring even if they did not

believe in them. It may have been feminine instinct, as unconscious as it was attractive. Pose is inherited by some human beings and displays itself in the small child when it tries by some trick to draw attention to itself. Mrs. Macdonald looked sharply at her daughter.

"You're talking nonsense, Fluffie," she said in a tone that silenced the child.

Prince glanced after Pauline's tall figure with a sudden loss of interest in Fluffie's silly remarks. Mrs. Macdonald kept her eyes on her work but the shadow of a smile hovered about her lips. The little comedy that was developing was easy to read. She liked Prince more than a little; but Fluffie was too young and inexperienced for him. If he and Pauline came together it would be an admirable thing for him and his neighbours in Ceylon. He was an acquisition as a bachelor but he would be ten times more popular if he were married.

He had a fine estate and one of the best bungalows in the district. With a lady at the head of it, someone who could do the honours and entertain, it would be one of the most popular houses. Everybody would rejoice. Pauline seemed made for him, courteous and dignified and able to sympathise with his love of sport.

This little movement on her part suggested to Mrs. Macdonald's astute mind a suspicion of jealousy. Prince had taken his seat close to Pauline with the

evident intention of talking about sport in Burma. He had her undivided attention, but he let it slip by an inconsequent little passage of arms with Fluffie, whose remarks were more than usually infantile. Pauline resented his desertion and showed her disapproval by leaving the group.

Prince was disconcerted by her action. He lost all interest in Fluffie's remarks and became absent-minded. He waited for her to return, but as she did not appear, he pushed away his chair and walked off. He did not, however, follow her. He turned in the opposite direction and went down by the companion to the lower deck to cut into a game of quoits if possible.

Meanwhile Pauline reached the end of the upper deck near the stairs that went to another part of the lower deck. There she encountered Ayton who was just coming up. He stopped and spoke.

"I am taking out a couple of retrievers. I don't know if they will be of any use where I am going. Come and see them. I should like to hear what you think of them."

He led the way to another part of the lower deck. The dogs were a fine pair, showing good breeding on all points. Pauline with her experience was quick to distinguish their excellent qualities.

"Mr. Prince would be interested in these," she said. "You have made his acquaintance?"

"A Ceylon planter, yes; he keeps a mixed pack of

hounds to run down sambur he tells me. These dogs wouldn't be of any use to him."

"Do you hunt deer in Burma with hounds?"

"Impossible! the country is too rough. We depend on the rifle."

"Where do you intend to use these retrievers?"

"I am hoping they will help in the wildfowl-shooting on the tanks and rivers. It is an experiment."

She glanced at him.

"You don't speak in a very hopeful tone. Why shouldn't they be of use?"

"Dogs have many enemies out in the East. Leopards will dare a good deal to take a dog. I lost a pet terrier in that way. The brute came right into the veranda of my bedroom and picked the dog off her raised bed just outside the french window where I had placed her for air and coolness. I heard her shriek as she was seized. I had my rifle at hand but though I was out of bed and into the garden in a moment, I was too late. The brute got away with her. Poor little Vick, the best of companions for a lonely man in the forests."

"Have they any other enemies?"

"Unless they are well looked after a python may take a fancy to one. Then there are all the smaller pests that make life a burden to the poor thing; fleas, ticks and leeches."

"Leeches! they sound unpleasant."

"So they are. They get into a dog's nose and worry

it off its feed. They are difficult to get rid of. You have to hold the dog's nose over a pan of charcoal. The leech finds itself getting uncomfortably dry and hot. It crawls down with the intention of finding a cooler and moister spot. You catch it with pincers and drop it on the charcoal."

"What wildfowl do you find on the tanks?"

"Duck of all kinds, geese, snipe, every kind of waterfowl you like to mention. There are flocks of them. My men are uncommonly glad of them for currying, meat being scarce in camp. I am not sorry to see game on my own table."

They left the dogs and returned to the upper deck. Fluffie was hovering about.

"Where have you been, Miss Laurison?" she asked.

"To see Mr. Ayton's retrievers."

This information called forth a lament on the part of Fluffie that she had not been invited to go too.

"I am so fond of dogs, Mr. Ayton. Do take me to see them," she pleaded.

"Sorry, I can't just now," he replied, glancing at his watch. "I'm due for cards in the smoking-saloon. To-morrow morning I shall be delighted."

"Have you a pack like Mr. Prince?"

She strolled by his side till he reached the smoking-room. He was attracted, but bridge had the stronger claim. Mrs. Macdonald had folded her work and put it away. She was looking at her restless daughter with

a shade of perplexity. She could not expect the girl to sit still all day. She must have exercise of some kind. The sound of the bull-board and quoit players came up from below.

"Would you like to see them playing bull?" asked Mrs. Macdonald. "Perhaps they will include you, Fluffie."

The girl danced with delight. They descended the stair ladder and found a number of passengers absorbed in deck games. Prince had just finished throwing quoits into a bucket.

"Come along, Fluffie!" he cried and they joined the party. "See if you can get these rings into the bucket."

She was welcomed by the young people who were forming another quartet. Most of them had never played the game before. Prince found a seat for Mrs. Macdonald. Having done his duty to his old friend he escaped.

Pauline had returned to her chair. Only Miss Vivyan remained. Prince came up with a request.

"Miss Laurison, I have some photographs I should much like to show you," he said. "I will bring them to the saloon if you will come down. We shall not be disturbed there."

SHE went to her own table. The cloth for lunch would not be laid for another hour. He joined her with a portfolio.

"You keep your photos loose."

"Yes; I can't stand albums. It is impossible to see the pictures unless you take them up and look into them. Here are the kennels and the hounds."

He handed her picture after picture and of each he had something to say.

"Here is one of a hound I valued highly, Hugo by name. Many a good run he and I had together. He was what we call a seizer. The seizers are held in leash till the last moment. When the stag comes to bay as he does in a pool or stream, the seizers are slipped. They know their work without any teaching. They go in and seize the stag by the ear and hold him till the huntsmen can come up."

"You speak of Hugo in the past tense. What became of him?"

"I lost him just before I left Ceylon in my last hunt. I was vexed beyond measure about it for he wasn't an old dog."

"How did it happen?"

"It was one morning last March. We found early and had a splendid run. The stag was winded. He came to bay in shallow water with a high rocky bank behind him. The pack gathered in front, barring the way. He faced the hounds with splendid pluck. They were giving tongue which was all they could do. I had released Hugo. He came up with a rush and leaped at the stag's ear.

"The stag was not badly winded. He rose on his hindlegs and struck at the deerhound, catching him full on the chest with his sharp hoofs. It was a terrible gash. The blow practically killed Hugo on the spot. There was no other seizer up in time."

"Poor Hugo!" said Pauline. "I did not know that a stag could fight like that with its feet."

"The stag recovered his wind, took a clean leap over the hounds and went down the valley towards the low country."

"Did you follow on and get him?"

"We lost him in dense jungle where the going was impossible for the hounds. It was not easy to replace Hugo. As soon as I reached England I set to work to try to find his successor."

"I hope you succeeded?"

"I was lucky and found a couple as well as a young boarhound that I think will be able to do the work."

"Are they on board?" asked Pauline who had not seen any other dogs but the retrievers.

"No, I sent them out three months ago. I wanted them to become acclimatised and learn something of their work before I arrived. Burton, who is looking after the pack as well as the estate, will have schooled them into shape by this time. He gives them short runs in the jungle that borders the estate. They very rarely find anything so near home, but they get exercise."

He put into her hands a photograph of two handsome foxhounds.

"Heather and Boxer, two favourites that were lost one day when the pack got on to a wild boar, always a danger we try to avoid. The boar turned suddenly on them and ripped these two, one after the other, before I could kill the brute. It plays old Harry with the pack if the hounds get on to a boar instead of a stag."

"Rather heart breaking to lose them like that, good servants as they are," remarked Pauline.

"They are more than that. They are not only companions but they share the pleasure and the excitement of the hunt, catching the enthusiasm from their masters."

He took up another picture.

"Here is a lost favourite named Juno. She was a hard worker, the most persevering hound I ever had. I think she must have gone on by herself when we lost

the scent by the banks of a river. Anyway she was missing a day and a half. An estate coolie brought her in more dead than alive. She had been badly clawed by a leopard. How she got away I don't know. I sewed up her wounds and applied disinfectants but she was too much torn to get over it."

He spoke with affection and regret. Every picture he took up had some pathetic history attached to it.

"Pets tear one's heart out. They so often come to a sad end," she said.

"That's a kangaroo hound, old Cooee. He made an excellent seizer, and was the hero of several encounters with wild pig. He was disembowelled by one of the biggest wild boars I ever saw."

"What is this group?" asked Pauline.

"A jungle-fowl shoot. It's just like pheasant shooting. I should say better if anything."

"It couldn't be!" protested Pauline. "Nothing can beat well-preserved covert-shooting."

"If you will come up to our district on your way back from your tiger-shooting, we will show you what it is like, and you shall judge for yourself. What time will you be leaving the Central Provinces?"

"Before the hot weather sets in, March or April."

"The jungle-fowl shooting will just be beginning. I wish you would come."

His tone was persuasive; he could see that the invitation was attractive.

"Is there any hotel within reach where I could put up?" she asked.

His face fell as he was confronted with a difficulty that he had not seen in the first burst of his enthusiasm.

"We have no hotels and no globe-trotters. I don't know whether it is a matter of congratulation or regret. In your case it's regret."

"If travellers appear on the scenes they can get no accommodation I suppose," she remarked.

"They don't come except by invitation."

He was thinking what a delightful visitor she would be, but he could not invite her to stay, his own house being a bachelor establishment. She was feeling an increasing regret that the way was barred. To conclude her excursion to the East with some shooting in Ceylon would have been pleasant whether the game was big or small.

"Have you any friends in the Island?" he asked.

"Sorry to say I have none."

Something in her tone conveyed an impression that she was not a woman of many friends. She had many acquaintances which was another matter. They were lovers of sport like herself and were drawn together in pursuit of their favourite amusement as golf players find themselves congregated at a club where there is a good course. Even her sporting experiences were limited to circles where the gun was used. She neither fished nor hunted, nor played any games, the reason

being that she had lived in the depths of Norfolk, where nothing else offered but partridges, hares and pheasants. She was summed up by men and women who knew her as a first-rate shot devoted to her gun.

The strange part of it was that it had not unsexed her. Her father saw to it that she did not adopt masculine ways. Tobacco had no lure for her. Forcible language did not attract her. She disliked it in others and found no use for it herself. Her dress was smart and well-chosen for the occasion, but essentially feminine in cut and character.

Unconsciously she appealed to Prince, first as a well-bred woman, secondly as a sympathetic companion with whom he could discuss sport, even those branches to which she was unaccustomed. Pauline broke the silence that had fallen between them.

"I should much like to see the jungle-fowl shooting. It sounds very attractive," she said.

"It is; and after Christmas we shall have an exceptionally good season."

"Isn't the shooting good every year?"

"By no means. It depends on so many contingencies."

A steward appeared. More than an hour had flown since they sat down to enjoy the contents of the portfolio. The man was anxious to lay the cloth for lunch. Prince gathered his photographs together and put them back.

"Will you bring them up on deck?" she asked.

"I would rather not. I don't mind showing them to you and telling you about my lost favourites that have given me so many happy hours. I couldn't speak of them casually to strangers. They might think me a soft-hearted fool over my hounds."

"Never! but I understand," she replied warmly.

"I'll take these pictures back to my cabin and join you on deck," he said.

She waited for him on the companion stairs. She wanted to hear more of the jungle-fowl shooting. Mrs. Macdonald had returned to her seat. She had seen Fluffie through quoits and bull and considered that she had done her duty. Instead of rejoining her they strolled to the rail from which they could look down on the games that were still in progress.

A soft breeze blew in off the Mediterranean. The sea rippled under the sun. It was blue and silver and deliciously smooth. A flock of gulls followed in their wake looking for the buckets of broken food that would be cast overboard as soon as luncheon was over. Their melancholy cries held a note of plaintive patience.

"Now tell me about the jungle-fowl. What are they like?" asked Pauline leaning her arms on the broad taffrail.

"In plumage they are very like bantam fowls but they are bigger. In weight I should say they nearly

come up to pheasants. Their flavour as game birds for the table is quite equal to partridges or pheasants."

"What do they feed on?"

"The seed of the nilloo, the strobilanthes, to be scientifically correct. The nilloo is an undergrowth in our up-country forests. It takes a period of seven to eleven years to flower and seed according to the variety. Ours is the eleven year nilloo so we don't often have our battues."

"It is a beautiful sight," he continued with increasing enthusiasm. "The forests look as though they were hung with delicate mauve gauze. Then begins one of the strangest processional sequences that nature can offer."

He paused reminiscently.

"You have no photograph of the nilloo in blossom among your pictures?" she asked.

"It would be impossible to photograph it, too ethereal. It would look just a wall of foliage."

It was a wonderful story he had to tell, the story of migration in the animal world in search of food. It began with the bees and butterflies in brilliant sunshine and ended with snakes in mist and rain, grass-snakes, tree-snakes and rock-snakes (pythons).

"All attracted by the same lure?" she asked.

"Yes, food in one form or another."

"What about the snakes?"

"They come after the frogs that fill the swamps and

pools. Where the frogs come from is a mystery. The noise of their croaking is deafening. They swarm in the grass and trees as well as in the water."

"Has the snake an enemy?"

"A deadly enemy in the snake-eagle which has a voracious family of young to feed."

"How do the creatures know when the feast is ready?"

"I can't tell you. All of them are migrants, some of them like the rats coming from a great distance. When the seed falls to the ground they are there, punctual to the day, the deer, the wild pig, monkeys and smaller game."

"Ah!" she exclaimed. "What a chance for the big-game sportsman!"

"The sportsman would find also the leopard and the smaller beasts of prey, out for flesh and blood, not for grain."

"The hunter and the hunted," she said with a grim smile. She was one of the hunters.

"It is a long sequence," he continued. "It begins in brilliant sunshine and ends in dense cloud and a tropical deluge."

"And afterwards?"

"The leaves of the nilloo are shed. The stems rot and fall in the gales. Thunder shakes the forest. The face of the landscape changes completely as the trunks of the old trees are revealed."

"How long does the jungle remain clear?"

"A year and a half to two years. The following spring the seed that has been left germinates and a young growth covers the ground as if some careful gardener had been at work making huge seed-beds. Once again the undergrowth fills up the vacant spaces, growing to ten or fifteen feet in height to bloom again in due order when its season comes round."

Prince told his tale as a man might speak of a garden that was dear to his heart. His listener was entranced, carried away by his enthusiasm.

"It is a most wonderful story," she said.

He looked at her with unconscious regret.

"You must manage somehow to join us after Christmas. I wish I could put you up. What an ideal visitor you would be in a planter's house. I never met anyone quite like you."

The colour swept into her face. She was startled as much by the light that shone in his eyes as by his words.

"Do you shoot big game as well as jungle-fowl?"

"Not over the nilloo seed. We don't trouble about the big game. Our business is with the jungle-fowl. We take fifty or sixty beaters—coolies off the estates—who are delighted to escape their daily tasks of weeding, plucking and pruning. The guns are stationed in the open glades. The birds break and go overhead just like pheasants. The fowl are fat and full of grain.

They fly heavily and are not difficult to bring down."

"I should love to see something of it," she said again, and there was a note of desire in her voice that rang true. It set his brain working as to how she could be included in one of these wonderful battues.

"I shan't be satisfied till I have shown you some jungle-fowl shooting. If Mrs. Macdonald gives you an invitation, you will accept it, won't you?"

"Does she live near you?" she asked.

"My estate, Dolna, lies at the head of the valley next to the jungle, the Government forest reserves. The Macdonald estate, Glendee, joins mine just below. The cartroad ends at the Glendee factory. I keep my car in Macdonald's garage but of course I can only use it when I go down the valley."

"You are higher up in the hills than any of your neighbours?"

"I think my estate is at a greater elevation than any others in that particular valley. The tea that I grow is what we call a high grade tea and commands good prices," he said.

"Is it cold where you are?"

"In the evening and at night. I am glad of a fire of logs in my smoking-room after dinner."

His thoughts wandered into unusual channels. He could see Pauline comfortably seated in the lounge chair occupied by the visitor, when he had one, her

eyes dwelling on the brave array of trophies hanging on his walls while he gave the history of each. If ever he married, this was the sort of woman—— He pulled himself up sharply. Fluffie came towards them.

"Here you are, Miss Laurison! We wondered where you were. Can you skip? It's splendid exercise. But it goes better with a gramophone."

She began step dancing and throwing the rope round her in evolutions she had learnt at school.

"You haven't answered my question," he said as Fluffie gyrated out of hearing in the performance of her figure.

"What was it?" asked Pauline although she had not forgotten.

"If you get an invitation to Glendee——?"

He leaned towards her on the taffrail and his eyes rested on hers with other questions in their depths, as he waited for her reply.

"If—and if—and if——" as the children say. "She turned to him with sudden warmth. "Of course I will come!"

He was satisfied. Fluffie's insistent:

"Look at me, Mr. Prince. Can you do this? Come and have a try," diverted his attention, but Pauline did not lose patience this time.

She, too, was satisfied.

THEY reached Port Said and entered the gate of the East. The change of scenery and of character was striking. It gave Pauline the sensation of having been suddenly transferred to a new world.

Foreign voices sounded from unusual quarters. Sirens were being blown in the harbour. Whistles and distant horns were shrieking and hooting on shore. The isolation of their little world on board ship was no longer intact. It was broken by a big outside universe that was strange.

Pauline dressed quickly and ran up on deck. She found a number of the passengers were before her, already gazing at the flat shore with its modern town. Some of the older travellers, like Prince and Mrs. Macdonald, looked round with a vague sense of regret for something that was passing out of their lives for a time. They were turning their backs on Europe, the doors of which were closing behind them. Others like herself were being given their first glimpse of the East.

The smooth waters of the harbour that lacked the azure of the Mediterranean reflected the morning sunlight with a dazzling glare. The buildings stood out in

crude colours without mist or haze to soften them to pastel shades. Beyond the warehouses and shipping on the other side of the harbour stretched the desert, that marvellous expanse of sand and rock so inimical to human life.

The summons to breakfast drew the little crowd down to the saloon. The Moodaliyar was already in his seat. The town of Port Said, as a sight, had lost its novelty for him.

"Miss Laurison, will you give me the pleasure of taking you ashore," he said.

"That's very kind of you," she replied. His offer was unexpected.

"You would like to land and see something of the place?"

"It would be very nice, but why should I trouble you?"

"I am making up a party to lunch ashore. We shall be starting on our way through the canal at about four o'clock in the afternoon. We shall just have time for it."

He turned to Ayton and the rest of the passengers who sat at his table and included them in his invitation.

"You will all come, won't you?"

It was accepted heartily and Ayton asked how he was going to manage it.

"We shall be a large party. I shall be glad to help and do my share," he said.

"I have already secured a launch to take us ashore," replied the Moodaliyar. "If we start in half an hour's time we shall be able to get a drive before lunch." He turned to Pauline. "I must show you the desert, Miss Laurison, and something old and Egyptian if I can manage it."

Full of the anticipation of finding their feet on terra firma once more, it was an excited and happy party that ran down the gangway and stepped into the luxurious motor launch awaiting them.

Pauline found Mrs. Macdonald and Fluffie, Miss Vivyan and Prince in the crowd. Fluffie was in an ecstasy of delight which she was expending on Prince.

He was not altogether happy. Matters had not gone at all according to plan as he had proposed to himself. He had made up his mind on arrival that he would take Pauline ashore alone if he could persuade her to go. If not he would ask Mrs. Macdonald and her daughter to join him. But while he was thinking it over, Hondara stepped in and swept the fish into his own net.

Not wishing to be out of it he accepted the Moodaliyar's invitation, seeing that otherwise he would be obliged to go ashore alone or not at all.

Hondara made a good host. It was not his first effort by any means. Everything was done on a generous scale. Cars awaited the party at the landing

stage and they were driven off swiftly to the various points of interest within reach.

Between one and two o'clock they were back at the hotel quite ready for lunch, the younger travellers feeling as though they had seen the whole of Egypt in a hectic round at the rate of forty-five miles an hour. It was undoubtedly very enjoyable whether it was a new or old experience.

Prince found Fluffie at his side more often than he could have wished. He would have been better pleased if it had been her mother. To Mrs. Macdonald he could have talked on the one subject that was nearest to his heart, Pauline.

It was hopeless to expect to have Pauline as a partner in either the launch or the cars. She was appropriated by the Moodaliyar or by Ayton, who was beginning to find her company desirable. During the drive she sat next to her host by his invitation.

"I am going to act as guide so I must have your ear," he said. "If I bore you, you shall put me out of the car and leave me to come back by camel."

"I am not sure that I should not ask to be put out too. The desert does not seem complete without the camel."

Ayton managed to secure the seat behind Pauline. Prince might have done so but he was not in a mood to share her company with a Cingalese, a descendant of kings though he might be. When they reached the open country the conversation turned from history, past and

present, to sport; but here Hondara failed her. He knew nothing of the game of the country and Ayton, to whom he appealed, was unable to help him.

Prince observed that Pauline was satisfied with the Moodaliyar's arrangements and that she was ready to drop into the seat he offered her. There was nothing in the manner of either to which he could take exception. Pauline was not a person who was likely to lose her dignity. Yet he was far from contented or happy during the trip.

They returned to the ship and with a warm expression of gratitude the party dispersed to their cabins. Prince added his thanks in a perfunctory manner and strode off to the smoking-room. The Moodaliyar's eyes followed him for a couple of seconds. Miss Vivyan recalled his wandering attention.

"I am particularly grateful, Moodaliyar," she said. "This is the first time I have landed in Port Said, although I have passed through the Canal several times."

"Indeed, but why?" he asked.

"I have always been travelling by myself and no one has ever offered to escort me. A woman can't walk about a town like Port Said alone, and so I have never ventured to land. I think if I had known that it was so quiet I should have had a look at it."

"It has very much improved of late years. It used to be one of the worst dens in the near East."

"I am not sure that I should have landed," said Pauline, "if the Moodaliyar had not invited me to be one of his party."

Miss Vivyan looked at her.

"With you and me, Miss Laurison, loneliness has its limitations whatever people may say of 'female independence.' "

A little later the ship had started on her wonderful journey through the desert.

After dinner Prince asked Pauline if she would go forward with him.

"You have no view here under the awning," he said. "If the quartermaster makes no objection, we will get right into the bows."

They succeeded in pushing their way forward. It was all very quiet. The water rippled away on either side, splashing the bare unlovely banks of the Canal. The ship's engines worked slowly, producing little vibration. The silence was strange and mystical.

Together Pauline and her companion watched the brilliant electric light, illuminating the walls of the Canal. As soon as the beam crept over the top of the wall, it fled away into the darkness of the level horizon of the desert where the blackness of the night seemed to devour it.

Here and there the light revealed a ghostly figure clothed in the long Arab gaberdine, standing on the shore. The man watched the great sea-going giant

as it glided along with a twin wash tailing after it. The ship to his lasting wonder obeyed the commands of its masters on board like a living, sentient creature. Its glittering row of lighted portholes shone with the watchfulness of a hundred eyes. An occasional jet of steam hissed from some unseen hole in its sides like breath from the nostrils of some dreadful monster.

Surprise and awe had long since ceased to thrill the man of the desert. He was familiar with every feature of the stranger who was invading his country. He actually knew the names of the ships that passed and sometimes the names of the Lines to which they belonged. The long thin dog by his side had also ceased to show any animosity, or to bark at the disturber of the silence of the night.

"You enjoyed your trip ashore," Prince said after he had explained the mechanism of the great electric moons above them.

"Very much. The Moodaliyar does everything so well. His guests cannot fail to be happy. His English education has taught him much."

"We must be honest and give the Asiatic his due," said Prince after a slight pause. He had the Briton's love of justice. "Men of his birth require very little teaching in the practice of courtesy."

They became silent again as they watched the beams of light. Prince was not at his ease.

"If you had only given me a hint yesterday I should

have been so pleased to have taken you ashore to-day. You need not then have been one of a large party."

"But I enjoyed it immensely!" she protested. "I would not have missed it for worlds, even though the supercilious might have called us a party of trippers."

"We were trippers I am afraid. The Burma passengers——"

She interrupted him.

"No! I won't allow them to be laughed at for their enjoyment," she cried. "They are the happiest set of people I have ever met. They sit at my table and make a joke of life, although I am afraid some of the poor things have to rough it like Mr. Ayton. Their fun is infectious. We have all made great friends with the Moodaliyar. He has told us all about his horses and polo ponies."

"You like him?"

"Impossible not to help doing so. I have been sitting next him at table for several days and we have found much in common to talk about. From the beginning he has been friendly and pleasant just as an Englishman might have been."

Prince made no reply. He did not see the necessity for any Englishwoman to become friendly and intimate with an Oriental. It was the deep-seated prejudice shared by all Englishmen in the East.

Whatever attitude they may assume towards the Asiatic themselves, the Englishwoman is never in their

opinion to unbend or relax her insular reserve. It may have its advantages. Pauline would have considered it bad breeding to have shown herself unsociable. The Moodaliyar took no liberties but always treated her with punctilious respect. There was nothing in his conduct that obliged her to be on the defensive. She felt that she could not do otherwise than treat him like a well-bred man of her own race and she was right.

"You are not cold?" Prince asked presently.

"Not at all thanks."

"The keenness of the night air is due to the fact that we are to all intents and purposes on land again, although we are still afloat. It is the difference between land and sea. We shall have it warm enough as soon as we pass Suez. Does the Moodaliyar amuse you?"

For the life of him he could not help reverting to the subject. As he waited for her reply a sudden flame of anger against himself startled him. He was behaving like a jealous boy. What could it matter to him if she talked and laughed with a good-looking man of the East as long as she liked?

"The Burma people amuse me. The Moodaliyar interests me."

"In spite of his not being what you and I would call a sportsman?"

"Isn't polo sport? and racing?" she asked. "They are his favourite pursuits and they give him no time for

shooting. All the same he has plenty to say about killing wild elephants, deer, leopards, crocodiles and wild pig. He says that he would like to show me some good waterhole sport."

"And I want to show you the up-country sport. It beats all the waterhole and low country shooting."

"The Moodaliyar says," continued Pauline following her own train of thought, "that if I took a proper staff of servants and shikarees I could quite easily put up at a Rest House and do some night-shooting."

"It would be rough and might be unpleasant."

"He strongly recommends me to go to a certain Rest House on his estate—I have forgotten the name of it. He keeps it in good repair and sends his European friends there when they want a little big game shooting. He has planters and officers from the regiment stationed at Colombo who like to come for two or three days."

"You couldn't join a man's party."

He spoke with an unconscious touch of impatience in his voice.

"No, I couldn't join a man's party," she repeated regretfully.

"You must tell him so if he mentions it again."

"I have already pointed out that I am alone and am with no party."

"I hope he saw the difficulty," said Prince quickly.

"On the contrary he would not allow that any difficulty existed. As the Rest House is on his estate

and his own property—he has put an old servant in charge of it—he does not see why I should not make use of it like the rest of his friends. He has a wonderful old shikaree, a Cingalese, who would go with me and see me through. It would only be for two or three days at most."

"Does he propose going with you?"

"No, I should be alone but that I should not mind. From what I understand there is no danger in this waterhole shooting if you stay behind the screen that is erected for you. I should have Bihoma—that is the name of the shikaree—with me and I should be shooting over private property. He owns tracts of forest and miles of lovely rivers and valleys, besides acres and acres of flat low country. He doesn't live in the low country. His house is in the hills near Kandy, in a broad valley where he has made a good polo ground and a training course."

"I have heard of it," responded Prince without enthusiasm. Everyone in the Island knew what the Moodaliyar was doing. Most people were personally acquainted with him and liked him for what he was.

"By all accounts it is a beautiful place; about the same elevation as Kandy and with a perfect climate. Have you ever seen it?"

"No, I am not a racing man."

"He is never tired of talking of it. He loves it as I

love my old Norfolk home. I am sure that he would be pleased to have me as a visitor."

"No doubt," replied Prince shortly. "You know that he is not married? Perhaps he has not mentioned the fact."

Pauline was sensible of a slight feeling of annoyance. Had she been decoyed into the bows of the ship on the excuse of looking at the electric lights just to be lectured on her behaviour? It seemed like it. Fortunately she was blessed with an even temper and did not easily take offence. At the same time she was of an independent nature, accustomed to go her own way regardless of advice.

"I assure you that he is quite open about himself," she remarked in a tone that should have warned him to drop the subject. He did not take the hint. "He has not spoken of his marriage," she added.

In the darkness of the shadow beneath the electric moons he could not see his companion's face. She spoke evenly and with an indifference that made him plunge yet deeper.

"The Moodaliyar's mother has probably chosen a wife for him already," he said. "We shall hear of his marriage soon."

"An affair that doesn't concern us. I should say that in such a matter he would decide the question for himself. I can't fancy a man of his character allowing anyone to interfere in things that belong to

his private life. Whether it be a horse or a dog or a wife he will make his choice independently of anyone else and will do it well and wisely."

Pauline drew her wrap round her shoulders. She had been betrayed into a championship that was unpremeditated.

"The night is decidedly cool. I think I will turn in. I am very grateful to you for showing me the way up here. It is a wonderful sight."

He had brought it on himself. The odd part of it was, that when he drew her away from the rest of the passengers, he had no intention whatever of talking about the Moodaliyar. He had slipped into it unawares. Some impulse that he had been unable to resist had prompted him to say more than he had intended. He was unwilling to let her go just at this point. Yet he felt unable to restore the intimacy with which they had started out to see the rather wonderful passage through the desert by night.

"Won't you stay a little longer? It is quite early still."

"I think that I have seen everything, thanks; and I really am afraid of the cold. It is different from what we have had in the Mediterranean," which was quite true.

"We shall be working through the canal all night," he said, following her closely as she picked her way along the lower deck. "I hope you will not be dis-

turbed. You will hear voices and shouting when we have to tie up to allow another ship to pass. They can't do anything in the East without a lot of talking."

"It won't affect me. I shall sleep through it all. Good night, Mr. Prince. I suppose this is good-bye to Europe."

"Yes, we have passed through the gateway of the East and shall be in Asiatic and African waters to-morrow."

THE Red Sea was hot and muggy. Everyone felt limp and disinclined for exertion. The deck games were neglected; entertainments hung fire; dancing lapsed by general consent. The only object that roused animation was the sight of the steward with glasses of iced drinks from the soda-fountain and the bar.

The fourth day ended their purgatory and they passed out into the Indian Ocean where the first breath of the monsoon met them, mild and genial with no threatening of the dreaded cyclone that so often heralds it.

A general revival all round was the result. The sports committee became active once more. The stewards' band was requisitioned again for dances. Gymkhanas and tournaments suddenly sprang into existence. Every item was infused with a haste born of the knowledge that the days were numbered. When Colombo was reached everything would come to an abrupt end. Half the party would break away and pass out of each other's lives for ever.

The least happy of the merry company was Prince. By this time he was conscious that love had seized

him in its grip all unawares, and he did not know himself in his new condition. He was too old to take it like a youngster, to swim with the tide that had overtaken him and to see life through rosy spectacles.

He fought against what he considered a weakness and tried to cure himself of the obsession as he called it. It was impossible. He might deny himself the pleasure of sitting by her chair, or pacing the deck with her in the tropical starlight, but it only made him the more miserable.

He could not avoid the games and competitions to which they were pledged. They inevitably brought him into close contact with her. Had he refused to play, all the arrangements and fixtures would have been thrown out. And what excuse could he have offered for his capricious conduct? None.

Pauline betrayed no consciousness of the havoc she had wrought. She went serenely on her way with her unfailing good temper. Her smile of grateful complaisance was the same whether Hondara or Prince handed her the quoits she pitched into the bucket. If one or other seated himself by her side in the warm dazzling noonday, or in the refreshing coolness of the night air, he was welcomed graciously. Often Ayton occupied the seat and held her entranced with yet another tiger story. She was an excellent listener.

One evening when they were half way through the Indian Ocean, Prince asked her to go forward with him

on the main deck. Most of the company not engaged at cards were dancing. It was a bright starlit night with no moon.

"The sea is inclined to be luminous to-night. It is a sight well worth seeing. You must come and look down at the water as the ship cuts her way through it. The phosphorescence only shows in the surf where the water breaks."

Together they leaned over the taffrail. The ship moved with a gentle roll, coming over and leaning towards the water. Then, picking herself up, she bent away on the other side. Pauline could hear the seething of the surf against the ship's sides as it curled over in long lines, leaving streaks of light as if a lucifer match had been drawn along the surface of the ocean. The faint strains of the band came from the upper deck and mingled with the purring of the water. Beneath it all was the pulsing of the engines like the regular breathing of a living being.

"How beautiful!" exclaimed Pauline. "It seems as though the ship is passing through a glowing green fire. We haven't had it like this before, have we?"

"I haven't seen it this voyage up to the present."

"What does it mean?"

"Bad weather I am afraid for those behind us. To-morrow it will blow, but we shall be gone; we are leaving it behind I am glad to say. In three days' time we ought to be in Colombo."

"And our pleasant journey will come to an end!" she remarked idly, her eyes following the lines of green light in the ripples. He was looking at her in the starlight.

"Or is it only beginning—for you and me, Pauline?"

He laid his hand on hers as it rested on the rail. She lifted her eyes to his, startled and only half comprehending.

"You mean——?"

"Will you marry me?"

The ice was broken and words poured forth. They were strong and forcible and fell on charmed and willing ears. He proved himself no backward lover.

Action followed speech quickly without hesitation. She found herself in his arms. A tumult of new emotions caused her to tremble from head to foot. Restraint broke down before an unfamiliar impulse which prompted a warm response. She yielded and let herself go, conscious only of being suddenly lifted into a dream of happiness and bliss.

She awoke with his lips still on hers.

Then reaction set in. This was not part of the programme she had arranged for herself. Hitherto, love and marriage had not intruded themselves into the visions of her youth. Her dreams and aspirations had been of sport and marvellous feats with her gun. In imagination she had seen herself bringing down birds right and left with an accurate aim that evoked the

admiration of her fellow sportsmen. She had caught the hare with a long shot as it loped along a furrow, scarcely visible to the inexperienced eye. She had bagged a brace of partridges out of every covey as the birds skimmed low over the hawthorn hedge and took cover in the turnips of the next field.

These had hitherto been the extent of her dreams, the end of her desire. Sport had been encouraged to grow into a passion, dominating her life to the exclusion of all else. This was abruptly changed by the entry of something that might prove infinitely stronger and greater; something that threatened to alter her outlook on life. At present it was only a shadow but where would it end?

Never, even in imagination, had she felt a man's strong arms about her, claiming in masterful fashion her love, taking toll of her lips and compelling a response that was involuntary. It was amazing, incomprehensible—but alluring and sweet.

And now what was this wonderful man saying?

"Pauline, darling! You haven't answered my question. You haven't told me that you will marry me," he cried, athirst to hear what he might well have read in her warm response. Prince would make an exacting lover.

She drew a little away from him. Her steady eyes met his.

"Do you need anything more? Then you shall have it. I love you! Yes! and—and I will——"

The colour flamed into her cheeks as she hesitated with a quick touch of shyness.

"Yes! yes! tell me!" he whispered impetuously "—'and you will—' tell me! finish what you were going to say."

"I will marry you."

Still he was not satisfied.

"You love me better than any other, better than—than the last man?"

She laughed at the jealousy that was peeping out.

"Silly old dear! There has been no last and no first."

"I am the only one?"

"The first and the last."

It was music in his ears and his heart gave a throb.

"I am in luck!"

Again he drew her to him. As soon as he would allow her to speak she said:

"I have spent my life in Norfolk, where birds and blackberries are plentiful but lovers are rare. You will have no rivals to disturb your peace."

"I am content."

Presently she turned herself in his arms.

"Yes! I was forgetting. You may have a rival—perhaps."

"I shall slay him! I shall shoot him at sight! Who is he?" he demanded.

"My rifle; sport. I can't give it up."

For a moment he had regarded her with anxiety, wondering to what strange love she might confess herself to be tied—a brother? sister? aunt?

"You may love sport all you like," he replied confidently. "It cannot come between you and me. It will be our friend, our mutual friend and draw us together."

They kept their secret till the following morning. The announcement of the engagement was hailed with delight by the whole company. All were agreed that it was a most suitable match. The couple had the same tastes, and Pauline had no ties to call her back to the old country. Mrs. Macdonald followed up her congratulations with an invitation to Pauline to pay her a visit before the wedding, which was accepted with gratitude.

Ayton also had an invitation for them, to be carried out after their marriage. They really must come and kill some of the tigers that preyed on the villagers' cattle in his district. They, as well as his own staff of axemen, would be eternally grateful if a good round dozen of tigers were slain.

Miss Vivyan regarded her companion with contemplative eyes. The two were preparing for lunch and up to the moment Elizabeth had found no opportunity of offering her congratulations.

"I wish you happiness and success in your new life,"

she said with a touch of solemnity that brought a faint smile to Pauline's lips.

"Thanks. I think we feel pretty sure on that score."

"Two of a trade don't always agree. However, I like the stories in the books I read to end up in marriage."

"Don't they usually finish with a love scene?"

"Sometimes it is left to the reader's imagination. I prefer to have it all definitely described on paper without any scamping of details. After all, it is usually the best part of the book and I feel cheated if the love scene is left out."

Pauline caught her round the waist and kissed her with a quick impulsive movement that took the other by surprise.

"You dear! you are constantly reading of lovers' quarrels and reconciliations; you think we shall quarrel over our guns. You need not fear that we shall tread on each other's toes. Sportsmen are level-headed people and know how to respect individual rights."

"That may be so in England where you are all marshalled by gamekeepers; but the conditions of sport are not the same in India."

"In what way?"

"There is no waiting to take turns and keeping to your special place when you are after big game. You may be given first shot but afterwards I have heard my father say it is anybody's game."

"I can quite understand that it would be impossible

to allow a wounded tiger to escape just for a scruple of etiquette. That of course is understood."

"Another saying of my father's remains in my mind. It impressed me at the time. Facing big game is very different from shooting pheasants and partridges. In England the game flies away from you as fast as it can and never dreams of standing up to you and hitting back. In the East it is quite possible that you may be yourself hunted, as well as the hunter. I remember my father being stalked by a slightly wounded tiger. It was touch and go, he said, which won."

She spoke dreamily, as though her memory had been jogged after long years. She seemed to be hearing the tales of sportsmen as her father sat with his friends in the veranda after dinner, smoking and yarning over their cigars. She was never out with him in the jungles and had no personal experiences of her own to relate, but she had a vivid recollection of the hairbreadth escapes of the men who sat there. The incidents stood out as clearly as if she had actually witnessed them with her own eyes.

She came out of her dreamland of the past, picked up her latest novel, its last chapters closed with the paper clip. Her eyes rested with something like affection on her handsome companion.

"Anyway, no man will grudge you first place in the field. Two of a trade will agree in your case."

Pauline laughed in pure enjoyment. She was

supremely happy with the firm conviction that nothing could bring a shadow across her path.

"You read so much fiction—plot and passion is the right name for it—that you can't believe in any love affair running smoothly. Mine is going to be so smooth and uneventful that I am afraid I shall disappoint all my friends. They will be bored stiff with the even course of our little romance. No jealousies over past and present! Nothing to make us quarrel!"

"Love that runs along those lines should be successful——"

"'Should be!'" cried Pauline in protest, "'is' successful you should say!"

"Yes, yes," replied Elizabeth slowly, as she turned and left the cabin.

She reproached herself for having given expression to any doubts as to Pauline's future happiness. Why should she try to cloud that radiant confidence in the future? It had never come her way, but there was no reason why it should not enter Pauline's life. In fiction there could be no "plot and passion" unless the course of true love ran crooked. In real life love frequently followed an uneventful course, ending in a happy marriage that had nothing exciting about it.

At lunch the Moodaliyar offered his congratulations. He did it with a delicacy that charmed Pauline.

"I have one regret," he said after she had thanked him.

"Not on my account I hope, Moodaliyar."

"On my own. This will probably prevent you from coming to see me. I was looking forward to giving you some shooting over a waterhole. You promised you would come."

"So I will, if I can."

He smiled at the proviso. She was already beginning to understand that her independence was at an end as far as the united interests of husband and wife were concerned.

"Mr. Prince will have other plans for you and I must reconcile myself to my disappointment."

"We shall see," she replied confidently.

"Whatever plans you and he may make, remember that I shall be pleased to see you both whenever you like to come. You have my address. You must write if you see an opportunity. My mother will be delighted to do the honours."

On arrival at Colombo a suggestion was made that there should be a big wedding in the cathedral, at which the passengers should be present. Various obstacles were in the way of fulfilling the plan. Pauline herself urged the most important. This was her visit to the Central Provinces.

"It is very kind of you all to wish to assist at the ceremony; but I must fulfil my engagement with my uncle. It is entirely on account of his invitation that I have come out to the East. What will he say if I fail him, having got as far as this?"

"He will say that you have the best of reasons," said one of her new friends.

"Then there is the object of my journey. I can't forgo that. I do really want to kill a tiger and it can only be done in India."

"Or in Burma," interposed Ayton.

"If you are determined to bag your tiger, you will have to go to Mr. Hayes," remarked Mrs. Macdonald. "Much as we all love you, we can't provide you with a tiger in Ceylon. We don't grow them in the Island."

"We might ask Hagenbeck, the wild beast man, to get us a tiger," said Fluffie, which raised a laugh all round.

"We have heard of a carted deer," said Prince, "but we have not arrived at a carted tiger yet."

"Anything! anything to keep Pauline with us!" cried the excited Fluffie. "And oh! I do so want to be bridesmaid!"

"You shall be bridesmaid, Fluffie, I promise you," said Pauline.

At Colombo the party broke up. The Burma passengers went on the next day. Mrs. Macdonald was anxious to get home. She left, repeating her invitation warmly to Pauline.

By this time Prince was desperately in love. He would have been quite willing to hurry on the wedding if Pauline had said the word, but she was firm in her decision. Having made up her mind to the course

she intended to pursue, she was not to be shaken in her determination.

Beyond expressing his regret that they were obliged to part so soon after having come to an understanding, he did not attempt to overrule her decision. He was anxious to prepare for the coming of his bride and make certain alterations in his bungalow that would conduce to her comfort. They would take a little time to effect and could not be done without great inconvenience after she came into residence. He had no intention of asking her to make the best of bachelor accommodation, comfortable as was his bungalow.

Burton, his assistant, who had been living in the house, must be provided with fresh quarters. For some time past Prince had been contemplating the building of a new bungalow near the tea factory for Burton. This could be done at the same time as the alterations to the house and while Burton was away on his holiday.

Miss Vivyan left the ship with Pauline. They went together to the Galle Face Hotel. Prince found a room at the Club, of which he was a member. He spent his time, however, mostly with Pauline at the hotel. Three days they gave themselves before separating. Elizabeth consented to remain, so that she and Pauline might travel part of the way through India together.

Prince offered his escort, although he could ill spare the time required, to see Pauline safely to her uncle's

house. She refused it at once with her customary decision. She pointed out that as she and Miss Vivyan intended to travel in a carriage reserved for ladies, nothing would be gained by his accompanying them.

His mind was relieved and he was content to see them off on their long journey by the mail train.

Miss Vivyan, with a fresh supply of novels bought in Colombo, was to leave Pauline at one of the big junctions. A few hours more travelling would see Pauline at her journey's end.

THE time passed quickly for Pauline, not quite so quickly for Prince. The days did not seem long enough to get all that he wanted to do into the hours between sunrise and sunset. And there were many hindrances. Building materials were hung up on the road. Fittings ordered from Colombo were promised faithfully with the maddening note: "as soon as we receive the goods from London." Colonials know best how they are obstructed and hindered in this way. There is no remedy for the delay. They have to sit down and possess their souls in patience.

Perhaps he was fastidious and inclined to think that nothing the Island had to offer was good enough for the bride who was coming. Here he was wrong. Pauline was not exacting. She was not even critical. What was good enough for Lionel would be good enough for herself.

They exchanged letters frequently, but their correspondence was not voluminous. They were both too much occupied to be able to spend hours in writing long screeds containing trivial details of their daily lives.

The estate was flourishing and gave Prince no cause for anxiety. Burton had been faithful to his trust while his Peria Dorai, as the master was known, was away. The tea-making had been good and the prices satisfactory.

The garden was promising and full of flowers and vegetables. Extensions were planned which meant sacrificing half an acre of tea. As it was his own property, he could do as he liked without asking any man's permission. The lawn tennis courts were relaid and a new court added. The little pavilion overlooking them was rebuilt and at the same time enlarged. Here he could see Pauline in his mind's eye, presiding at the tea table, welcoming his old friends and winning their hearts with her geniality.

The hounds were fit. Burton had seen to it that they were exercised but he had done very little hunting, restricting himself to the jungles close at hand. Prince determined to take them out as often as he could. He was anxious to get the pack into good form by the time Pauline arrived. He had set his heart on showing her a sport that was entirely new to her. He believed that it could not fail to appeal strongly to her sporting instincts.

He was of opinion that elk-hunting ranked higher than tiger-shooting. In the latter the game was driven by beaters into range and the sportsman with his rifle was more or less safely seated in the howdah on

the back of an elephant. Following the hounds on foot from start to finish required strength and endurance. At the end there was the fight and always the chance that the stag might get away. It was a greater test as a sport than shooting.

But he was not going to allow Pauline to follow the hounds on foot all the way through the jungle. It would not be fit for a woman. He and the field would do that. She would go by paths which were well defined and practicable to the spot where the stag would come to bay. She would be in at the finish.

He bought a steady pony to carry her up the hills to the points where she was likely to see the finish. The best hunting ground was some miles from the estate. Frequently the hounds were taken overnight to a Rest House from which the forest could be worked, beginning at an early hour while the scent was fresh. Many a pleasant party had Prince gathered round him at that same Rest House, he being host and providing food and liquor. There were those among his guests, young men on small salaries, who could never have afforded such a picnic. There were older men who would gladly have shared expenses, but Prince would have none of it. His generous hospitable nature delighted in entertaining all who accepted his invitations and in showing them sport.

Pauline's letters were full of her own exploits. She

had been shooting duck and pigeon and a few peafowl. Nothing in the shape of a battue for jungle-fowl was offered, such as Prince had described took place in Ceylon over the nilloo. That class of shooting, she said, was not done where she was, due to the fact, she imagined, that there was no nilloo round about them.

Enthusiastic sportsmen are apt to be a little selfish without being aware of it. She made very little comment on his account of all that he was accomplishing for her sake at Dolna. She devoted her space to describing the country, its magnificent hills and the opportunities it offered for shooting big game and small.

Then came the great news. After two or three expeditions in which some red deer were secured with one or two chital, she had fulfilled the dearest wish of her heart and bagged her tiger.

She related all the details, omitting nothing. She and her uncle started out on elephants through rough country in which a tiger had been marked down by the shikarees.

When at last they caught sight of the movement in the grass made by the passing of the tiger, her excitement was beyond description. She quivered all over and had a difficulty in holding her rifle. It was not fear that caused her to tremble. She felt almost too safe perched up in the howdah with her uncle and the

shikaree. It was the presence of the great beast. She could not see it but she was certain that it could see her. She remembered Miss Vivyan's tales and wondered if the tiger was stalking them and would presently spring upon them with a mighty leap.

The tiger had been driven from its lair among the warm rocks where it had been sunning itself like a cat. The shouts and tomtoms of the beaters made it uneasy and it was sneaking off, intending to escape under cover of the great tussocks of long, coarse grass. If it thought to hide from its pursuers it was mistaken. It could not escape the sharp eyes and keen scent of the inhabitants of the forest. The tiger has no friend to lend it assistance. Every bird and beast betrays its presence in fear and hatred.

The monkeys stuffing their cheeks with berries know that it is there. They chatter and scold, scuttering away to the topmost branches of the trees. In their agitation they grip the boughs and shake them violently as they pour forth their abuse. No matter how the tiger may hide and creep they continue their demonstration of hate until it has taken itself off. No sooner is it safely out of the way than they venture down and resume their feast. They have good cause for their animosity. The tiger has no objection to making a light meal off a plump young monkey if the deer have moved on out of its way.

The birds have something to say to the king of the

beasts, although they can usually keep out of reach of its deadly claws. The peafowl scream their displeasure; the pigeons and doves flutter uneasily in the foliage and the small birds twitter and give cries of warning. The deer, if they have not already fled, spring away in terror and the wild pig takes refuge among the rocks at the bottom of the valley.

"My tiger came out of the scrub into an open glade," wrote Pauline, "where the long grass ended in bare patches of stony soil. It walked into the brilliant Indian sunlight, sullen and annoyed. It did not appear to be in the least afraid of us. It reminded me of a strange cat that was trespassing.

"Its coat matched the sun-burnt grass, the yellowish grey soil and the strong sharp shadows that harmonised with the colouring. It was still three-quarters hidden by the scrub and its head was down, again just like a cat in two minds whether to make its escape or to put on a bold face and stand its ground.

"It decided on the latter course and drew out from the grass into the open. There it stopped and lifted its head as if it intended to take a good look at us. I could see its tail. The end was twitching as if it was losing its temper. At that moment the beaters renewed their shouts and sounded their drums louder than ever.

"My uncle gave me the signal to fire. 'Now!' he said. 'Before it gets away.'

"I had already covered it with my rifle. At the sharp

crack of my shot the tiger gave a terrific leap into the grassy scrub.

" 'Missed!' I cried, trembling all over with disappointment.

" 'I think not!' replied my uncle.

"We could see the animal crouching as if for a spring. I made sure that it would jump on to the elephant in another second. Old Moti, my uncle's favourite shikar elephant stood firm as a rock.

"My bullet had gone home. The tiger fell over on its side and lay still.

" 'It is dead! I have killed it after all!' I cried with a feeling of intense joy. I begged to be allowed to get off the elephant and go to it, but my uncle wouldn't hear of my doing so.

" 'Don't be too sure that it is dead,' he warned me. 'Just as well to be careful. If it is only stunned and wounded it may yet spring upon us.'

"I had to be patient but I assure you it was difficult. It is not an easy matter to slip off the back of an elephant. It must be made to kneel first so I had to remain where I was. There was no movement on the part of the tiger. The shikaree who had been in my uncle's service many years was the first to go near it. At a signal from the mahout the elephant assisted him with its trunk to dismount. My uncle covered the tiger with his rifle as the man approached. It was wonderful to see the caution that was used to avoid an

accident. The shikaree reached the beast and peered at it. Then he drew himself up with a gesture of pride, as if he himself had been responsible for the killing of it.

" 'The Miss Sahib's bullet has gone true. The tiger is dead,' he proclaimed in his own queer language which my uncle translated.

"The beaters, mostly hill men, pressed forward to look at me. I was dressed in shooting kit, plus fours and tunic. They couldn't make out whether I was a boy or a woman. I don't think they believed the shikaree when he assured them that I was a Miss Sahib.

"A tiger is not picked up like a pheasant. It took some time to hoist it on to the back of a pad elephant and make it secure. We were more than ten miles from home. It turned out to be a large tigress which had done much damage among the herds of the villagers and there were great rejoicings at its death. The reason why it was inclined to show fight was because it had a cub hiding in the grass. If we had been on foot the tiger would have been an ugly customer to deal with."

Pauline had plenty more to say of other hunting expeditions but on the whole they were not as successful as she could have wished. She had been after other tigers but this was the only one she had secured.

She wrote enthusiastically of the country, its beauty, its valleys and rivers, and of the big game she had seen but had not killed as she had hoped. Unfortunately

her uncle was not in good health. He really was not fit to do any jungle work. He was troubled with fever and for that reason was disinclined to go into camp. And camping was necessary if one wanted to get into touch with the game.

Pauline expressed herself as very anxious to do some waterhole shooting. Here again her uncle's bad health interfered. His medical man forbade any night exposure, saturated as he was with malaria.

She would have gone alone with the shikaree but this Mr. Hayes refused to allow. He was equally opposed to her sitting up over a kill. It was impossible to combat his old-fashioned notions. He considered that he had done all that was necessary, all that she ought to expect, in taking her out on an elephant and arranging a beat. She must be content with the good luck that had been hers when she secured the tigress.

She mentioned wild elephants, wild buffaloes and bison, but these were ruled out altogether with various excuses. She was obliged to accept the excuses and reconcile herself to a refusal to take her into the districts where the game was to be found.

The truth was Mr. Hayes had secured his own trophies long ago, and big game shooting was almost a closed book through ill health. He wanted no more skins and heads. He had secured enough to adorn any house that he might settle in at home.

Pauline had to be content but it was tantalising to be

in the same district as the big game and not to be allowed to get at it. Small game she could have as much as she chose; but wild fowl, pigeons, snipe and quail had no attraction. She would have done better among the pheasants and partridges in Norfolk.

Prince condoled with her and expressed his regret that she had been disappointed in obtaining the heads she wanted. He promised to provide her with as fine a head of sambur as she could find in the Central Provinces. His hounds would bring it down in her sight at her very feet.

She thanked him but she did not add what was in her mind. It was her ambition to possess a head of her own killing.

It was March. The sun on the plains was beginning to show its fierceness. Up in the hills, whether in India or Ceylon, the climate was idyllic. In the words of the inspired Poet: "The rain is over and gone; the flowers appear upon the earth; the time of the singing birds is come." They had soft, warm days with a wealth of blossom to scent the air and cool, refreshing, dewy nights, when the punkah of the plains might well be forgotten.

And with the spring Pauline was to come.

After some correspondence it was arranged, chiefly through Mrs. Macdonald's influence, that instead of being married in Colombo on arrival as at first planned, the wedding should take place from Glendee.

It would be a very popular event. All Prince's friends in the valley would be able to gather round him and give him what they called "a good send off". The decision was hailed with delight. Fluffie was to be the only bridesmaid. Burton, back from his two months' holiday and settled in his new bungalow, was asked to be best man, an office that he accepted with pride and pleasure.

There was to be no going away for the honeymoon. The two sporting enthusiasts decided that the time could not be better spent than in jungle-fowl shooting and days with the hounds. Nowhere else could they find a better centre for their operations than Dolna, from which place they had easy access to the Rest House on the Horton Plains.

The alterations to the bungalow had been made and Pauline would be on the spot to put the finishing touches to a house that was admitted to be, with its big garden, one of the most desirable in the Island.

Pauline arrived with her gun-cases and cartridge-bags as well as an extra case or two of frocks and hats, and the various odds and ends accumulated by a bride under the comprehensive term, trousseau.

She and Prince had seen little of each other after they had come to an understanding. They were avowed lovers for two days on board ship and three days in Colombo. Then they went their different ways and saw no more of each other. It was practically a five days' engagement.

The rest of the time—from October to March—they could only improve their acquaintance by correspondence. She had imagined herself in love during those precious five days. During the five months following her love had strengthened. She found that he had entered her life and was becoming part of it. Nothing, she said to herself, *nothing* could ever upset the course

of their love. She recalled Miss Vivyan with her sensational fiction, rigorously protected against her own dishonesty by paper clips. She smiled at the disappointment Elizabeth would feel in the prosaic ending of the boardship romance.

Pauline was to stay with Mrs. Macdonald for three weeks. At this season of the year they could rely on the weather; it would not play them false. The garden at Glendee was of a fair size but it would only just contain the big company invited to the wedding.

The marriage was to take place at two o'clock in the afternoon, at the little church four miles down the valley. The reception was to be held between three and four o'clock, as soon as the crowd could reach Glendee. The wedding breakfast was to be a bountiful spread, such as would satisfy the sturdy colonials who had come from far, starting early after a light breakfast.

Prince was informed at the club amid much chaff that the young men intended to escort the bride and bridegroom to the door of their house, where they were going to see that he carried his bride over the threshold to ensure good luck.

"All right," replied Prince good-humouredly. "And then I shall shut the door in your faces. The champagne will be at Glendee; not at Dolna."

Pauline was grateful for all that had been done for her and was ready with her thanks. She was delighted with her reception as Prince's bride and as a future

member of the little colony of planters. If the excitement of killing a tiger had diverted her mind from her lover, it was brought back and concentrated on this new and wonderful crisis in her life. The tiger episode was a thing of the past. She had nothing to show for it. The skin had been sent straight to England to be set up. The memory of her achievement was all that remained.

"I didn't know that people could be so kind to strangers," she said to Prince, as she sat with him among the roses and orange trees of the Glendee garden.

"Our exiled life draws us together and you soon discover what warm hearts we planters have and how good we can be to each other," he replied.

"I must pass it on when you have made me one of you."

"You will be the first to hold out a helping hand, I am sure, darling!" he said as he drew her closer. He had been so long separated from her that he was for ever trying to make up for lost time.

As has been said, the climate of Ceylon is at its best on the hills during the first four months of the year. On the high ground inland the hill breezes are like the mountain air of the highlands of Scotland. Although there is a tropical sun in the day, the nights are cold. Out on the pat'na—the downs—a touch of hoar frost may be found in February.

It was arranged that a hunt should take place a week

before the wedding. The time had come when Prince was to show Pauline what he and his fellow planters regarded as the blue ribbon of Ceylon sport. The hunting of the stag; the bringing of it to bay and the despatch of it with the hunting knife, an open hand to hand fight. At any time the stag might throw off its pursuers and escape into the low country, as Prince had explained to Fluffie on board ship, when she was expressing sentimental regrets.

Fluffie was invited to join the expedition. She had refused. Her mother brought pressure to bear and asked her for Pauline's sake to go. She was still unwilling when something occurred to cause her to change her mind.

Mrs. Macdonald was lamenting the fact that no other lady was to be of the party and Pauline would have to go alone to the rendezvous. Prince said:

"It doesn't matter. Don't force Fluffie to go against her will. Burton has offered to escort Pauline. He has been through the jungle so often after the hounds that he will not be sorry to be let off the run."

"That's all right," said Mrs. Macdonald with relief. "I don't want to oblige Fluffie to go and see the kill if she objects."

"I have no objection to being present," said Fluffie suddenly veering round. "I need not look on unless I like."

"It is a pity that you should be compelled to go

against your will. It will be a very fatiguing day," said Prince as he caught Mrs. Macdonald's eye. "You had much better stay at home with your mother." He turned to Mrs. Macdonald. "What do you think about it?"

She understood that he meant something more than the hunt. Burton had already shown a marked preference for Fluffie's company. The liking seemed to be reciprocal.

"I will leave Fluffie to decide for herself," replied Mrs. Macdonald.

"Oh, Mummy! I should so like to go with Pauline. I am sure I ought to do so, and I need not look at the stag."

Prince laughed outright at this sudden compunction. He turned to Mrs. Macdonald.

"You may safely trust her to Burton's care. A better fellow never stepped."

Prince undertook to make the necessary arrangements for their comfort. All he asked of them was that they should be ready for an early start, as they had some distance to ride into the forest to reach the rendezvous.

"I will send Pauline's pony down to Glendee over night if you will kindly give it stable room."

"What about sandwiches? Can I do anything?" asked Mrs. Macdonald, an old campaigner.

"Leave it all to me."

Prince returned to his bungalow full of energy and enthusiasm. He was never so happy as when he was arranging a shoot or a hunt. On this occasion he intended it to be one of the best, with nothing omitted to make it a success.

A small party of men assembled over night at Dolna. An early start before sunrise was arranged, and their host was rigid on the point of turning in betimes. No cards and no sitting up smoking and yarning was allowed.

Pauline at Glendee was called at half-past four in the morning. After a hasty breakfast by lamp light she and Fluffie mounted their ponies and rode up to the Dolna bungalow which was on their way.

Prince met them at the portico. Burton was with him.

"You are going by a direct route to the spot where the stag is expected to bay if all goes well," he said as his hand closed over Pauline's. "We shall draw the jungle on the ridge above and work down into the valley where there is a little river. It is right in the hills, high up; a beautiful spot, most suitable for a picnic. The stag will not run straight. It will try to throw us off. This will give us, first and last, a run of five or six miles through forest and pat'na over very rough ground."

"Can't I come with you?" Pauline asked. It was a disappointment to find that they had to separate.

"I would rather you did not. You don't know the jungle as we do and you might so easily get lost."

He looked at her with a sudden anxiety as he spoke of her being lost. That indeed would be a calamity that would not bear contemplation. She was dissatisfied, more so than he realised.

"It seems so tame to be just waiting for the end without taking any part in the hunt."

"But it may not be the end. If the hounds receive a check, which is very likely to be the case, they will come up a little late. The stag may recover its wind and be off again down the valley."

"Then may I follow?"

"It will only be possible to do so on foot and you must wait till we come up. I hope we shall be close on to the stag and give it no chance of breaking bay. If you should have a chance of following, keep Fluffie with you."

He glanced round at the girl who was scarcely visible in the darkness. He could just distinguish the figure of Burton standing by her pony. Burton was going on foot.

"There's my S.D. He will take care of you and keep you all together. I am also sending a shikaree—Peroo!" he called.

In reply a long-legged, wiry old man emerged from the shadows and salaamed. He carried a basket on his head. The syces followed at his heels.

"Here he is!" He spoke to him in the vernacular, giving him directions where to go. The old man was to act as guide and see that they did not lose their way. "If you want to cross a stream, Pauline, get on his back. He'll carry you over safely and find a place where it can be forded. Keep to the track he points out. If the track is overgrown he will cut it out for you."

"We shall have the syces as well to help. We ought not to get into any difficulties," observed Pauline, who was not at all grateful for all this—as she considered it—unnecessary care.

"The syces must attend to the ponies. While you wait for the bay you can discuss the contents of the tiffin basket which I have put in charge of the shikaree."

A voice called from the bungalow.

"Prince! Prince! where are you?"

The men were finishing breakfast. Some of them were already in search of hats and caps in preparation for the start. Prince beckoned to the syces. They came forward with the shikaree, who, in addition to the basket, was carrying a lantern. One of the syces had a gun-case. Prince turned to Pauline.

"You have brought your rifle, I see," he said.

"In case you turn out a leopard."

"We are not in the least likely to do so. The leopards, if there are any about, will be sneaking off in another

direction as soon as they wind us in the jungle. Better leave your rifle here."

"I would rather take it with me," replied Pauline. She spoke with a touch of obstinancy. She had been deprived of what she considered a real hunt and now he wanted to take away the weapon without which she felt that it would be a farce to go in search of big game. Sambur were not the only wild beasts to be found in the forests.

"I assure you that it will not be needed."

"Perhaps not, but even if I have no occasion to use it, I like to feel that it is within reach. Darling! You don't mind, do you?" she said in such a way that he succumbed at once. "We might see a wild elephant!"

"Not a chance of it! We should have to go much farther afield to run up against an elephant. Take care of yourself, dearest. I wish I could go with you but my place is with the hounds."

"Prince! Prince!" came from the house. "The kennelman is here. He wants to know if he may unkennel the hounds!"

It was a quarter past five and time to be starting. With yet another injunction to take care of herself, follow the shikaree and stick to Burton, he ran back to the veranda.

Sport versus love. At this moment sport was the order of the day and love must needs take a back seat.

The shikaree led the way with his hurricane lantern. The path was clearly defined, having been made when the estate was planted up. It ran up the slopes that were covered with pruned tea-bushes. It was not possible to do otherwise than proceed in single file. The pace was a brisk walk. The way was narrow, having on one side a deep drain and on the other the camelia like tea, four feet in height and as neatly trimmed as well-kept laurels in an English garden.

In front of them the jungle stretched to right and left like a barrier in the shape of a wall of almost impenetrable forest. It was only when they arrived at the end of the path that Pauline saw the entrance. It would have escaped her notice even in the daylight but for the fact that it had recently been cut away and enlarged.

By this time the sky in the east was growing light. The dawn comes up quickly in the tropics. The mists of the night hanging over the peaks and ridges drew away from the dripping forests and the ramparts of rock, floating up into a clear sky.

The shikaree, still carrying his lantern, entered the dark tunnel of foliage where the shadows were deep. Pauline followed. After her came Fluffie and close behind was Burton who was helping himself in the steady climb by keeping his hand on the crupper of the saddle. The two syces brought up the rear. If they conversed at all it was in grunts. Pauline was silent

What Burton had to say to Fluffie was spoken in too low a voice to be overheard.

The air was cold. Pauline was clad in her hunting suit, breeches, gaiters and tunic and cartridge-belt. She was prepared for anything the weather might offer. Fluffie was less happy in her choice of dress. She wore an ordinary tweed skirt and jumper, silk stockings and walking shoes. She was quiet, and without a spark of enthusiasm for the object of their morning excursion.

Her sole pleasure was in the proximity of Burton. Every now and then her hand went round to the back of the saddle till it rested on his.

"Anything I can do?" he asked solicitously and pressing forward till he touched her stirrup.

"I only wanted to be sure that you were there. It is still so dark in the jungle."

"We shall soon have it lighter. There is nothing to be afraid of."

"Sure a leopard won't jump out at us?"

In his eyes her fears were fascinating. They placed him in the happy position of personal protector, a rôle that never fails to enthrall the young man if he is worth anything.

This was Fluffie's first introduction to the "elk-hunting" of which the planters spoke with such pride. Her father frequently joined the hunters, but to-day he was busy in the factory. In any case he would not have been with his daughter. He had not arrived at

the age that preferred to wait with the ladies for a bay.

The shikaree extinguished his lantern as there was sufficient daylight to proceed without it. He continued to lead, although the path was not difficult to follow. Here and there was a faint indication of a branching gametrack; but Prince had left nothing to chance. Two or three days previously he had sent coolies to clear the way and cut out any obstructing growth.

When they first entered the jungle a curious stillness reigned. A breeze occasionally brushed the tops of the trees, but did not penetrate into the depths below. It seemed as though Nature was just awaking to the bustle of the day. Gradually the golden rays of the rising sun shot up into the sky and formed arcs of primrose light overhead. Then a pigeon cooed and the forest was awake.

The night birds withdrew into the deep shade of the rocky hollows and thick foliage. The wild pig and the deer that had fed to repletion on roots and grass and young shoots retired from the open glades and sought the recesses of the forest where they could sleep off the greed of the small hours of the morning.

Jungle-cocks challenged each other and the bronze-winged pigeons filled the air with their soft cooing. Hill-mynas chattered and played hide-and-seek in the foliage among the opening blossoms of the trees and the green barbet, hidden among the leaves it resembled, ran up the scale in crescendo notes unceasingly.

High over head the kite and the eagle soared into the rays of the sun. On distant rocks the monkeys called to each other with deep "hoo-hoos" before starting on their quest for food on the lower slopes of the hills, where the villagers had their gardens and grew sugarcane and coffee berries.

Up and down but never on the level Pauline and her companions travelled, always gaining in elevation rather than losing. Occasionally the forest opened out into little glades through which streams wandered. Crimson rhododendron bushes began to appear and in exposed places the old man's beard—the long grey lichen—hung from the hoary branches of the old forest trees.

Then they tunnelled into the jungle again and were hedged in by the nilloo. They had another long climb over a ridge. Descending on the other side, they came out into broad sunshine and found themselves in a beautiful valley among the hills. A river ran through it. The little streams of the glades helped to swell it into a respectable size.

Pauline looked round doubting if the ponies could ford it as they had done in crossing the smaller streams. The long grass came down to the edge of the banks, which were steep and rocky. The bed of the river was strewn with boulders. Between the stream and the jungle, tussocks of grass grew that must at times have stood in liquid mud.

Slabs of living rock broke through here and there, making a slippery surface for the ironshod feet of the ponies. Close to the water the wild balsam and begonia hung their quivering, rosy blossoms. It was an ideal spot for a picnic.

PAULINE glanced up the valley wondering if the river could be forded. She was not anxious to trust herself to the old shikaree and cross on his back. She caught sight of the white foam of cascades and rapids. Below, where the stream was clear of rocks, it spread out into shining pools. The kingfishers were already on the wing as they dipped and skimmed over the surface of the water. The margins of the pools were imprinted by the feet of the various animals that had come to drink at dawn. Pauline wondered if it was the chosen place for the promised bay.

At present, except for the shikaree, she was alone. He placed the basket on a patch of flat rock free from vegetation.

"Are the others coming?" she asked.

He was unable to speak English but apparently he comprehended. He wagged his head and waved his hands in the gesture of assent that she was beginning to understand.

Presently the syces emerged from the jungle but there was no sign of Burton and Fluffie. Pauline called to her syce who brought the gun-case and placed it beside her. She asked where the missie was.

"Lady coming. Master say 'go on', and we come."

She smiled. It was not difficult to guess what was delaying their steps.

"Are we going on any farther?"

"No, lady. Here is the sitting-down place where the big master told us to wait."

He held the stirrup for her to dismount. She was not sorry to take the hint. She had been in the saddle for a good two hours and although they had never gone out of a walk she was beginning to feel tired. Riding over steep inclines was fatiguing and she was glad to slip off her willing steed.

"How long do we wait?" she asked.

The syce repeated the question to the shikaree. Before replying he looked up at the sky. On either side of the valley the ridges that formed it were covered with forest. The sun had mounted the eastern ridge and its warm rays had just reached the river. The shikaree traced an imaginary line in the path of the sun and then arrested his finger. The syce understood the sign of the man of the jungle.

"We wait one hour if the big master finds the stag and makes it run this way."

Fluffie and Burton appeared on the edge of the jungle. She whipped up her pony and came towards Pauline looking like a sweet English brier rose.

"So sorry to be so far behind," she said lamely.

"My dress caught in a thorn bush and Mr. Burton had rather a bother in getting it clear without tearing my skirt."

Pauline's eyes rested on the beaming face of the handsome boy who stood by the side of the pony.

"Congratulations on having disentangled Fluffie's frock—and anything else you may have done at the same time."

He laughed a little nervously, and the colour came into his face. He understood.

"Thanks, Miss Laurison. I am sure we have your sympathy. I only hope that Mrs. Macdonald will see it in the same light."

"I think you may take heart in the fact that she allowed Fluffie to come out with us this morning."

Meanwhile Fluffie was thinking that she had been neglected quite long enough.

"Pauline! Are we to stop here? I have had quite enough riding for this morning."

"So the shikaree says."

Burton turned to the old man and spoke to him in his own language.

"He says that the stag will come to bay in the river here. It will probably first take the water among the rocks below the cascades. Prince has killed in this valley two or three times."

"Harry! Harry! I want to dismount."

He turned to Fluffie and allowed her to slide off the

saddle into his arms, a little interlude that he did not hurry over.

Burton unstrapped a rug that was attached to Pauline's saddle and spread it on the rock.

"A hard seat I am afraid, but the best we can find. You have a magnificent view up and down the valley and ought not to miss the finish. It is a case of patience. The shikaree begs us to keep very quiet and to speak low. We must be careful not to head the stag back into the jungle. You know, Miss Laurison, we have the possibility always before us that it may get away."

"I hope it will!" cried Fluffie. "Oh, Harry! I don't want to see the poor thing murdered——"

"You shan't see it, darling," he said in a voice that he hoped would not reach Pauline's ears.

"We will cover your head with a rug at the critical moment," said Pauline.

"But I shall hear it scream!"

They both laughed and Pauline said:

"Let's have some lunch."

Burton began to open the tiffin basket and Fluffie forgot her qualms and fears. Although she and Pauline had made a hearty breakfast before starting they were quite ready for the good things Prince had provided for them—sandwiches of all sorts, pastries, cakes and fruit. At the bottom of the basket was a box of chocolates.

The syces led the ponies to a large rhododendron

bush, worthy of the name of tree with its short grey trunk and sturdy branches. It had put on a mantle of crimson blossoms after the winter rains. It stood near the jungle and cast a broad shadow in which the ponies were tethered.

From a bundle, carried by one of the syces, food for themselves as well as for the ponies was produced. After the men had eaten they squatted on their heels, chewed betel and listened to the gossip of the shikaree. He belonged to a village where there was a chuttram and a temple, and plenty doing in the way of the tax-collector's visits and the latest family feud with its consequent breaking of heads. The syces were living on the estate which was far removed from any village. The little world of the coolie lines was kept in a state of order by the big master. It admitted none of the tragedies so dear to the heart of the villager; life was dull beyond description. The opportunity of hearing all the latest news was highly valued and the shikaree had nothing to complain of in the attention paid by his audience.

The picnic finished, Pauline opened the gun-case and took out her rifle. She charged it with a cartridge suitable for big game. It was just as well to have it ready in case a leopard showed itself. She was anxious to obtain two or three more skins.

Her hope regarding a tiger had been fulfilled but in the matter of other game—leopards, deer, bear, wild

boar and crocodiles—she had been disappointed. For her own sake she regretted more than ever the failure of her uncle's health.

Her eyes scanned the sharply defined edge of the jungle. If by good luck a leopard crept forth, she felt confident that she could secure it. The tall keena trees of the forest stood out against the sky showing their rounded heads which were covered with crimson shoots. These were like blossoms among the glossy green foliage. The magnolia-like flowers of the sapu trees were opening in the sun and had drawn bees and butterflies in numbers. The more modest osbeckia spread its pinkish-lavender petals beneath.

The undergrowth was chiefly nilloo. It was of the same variety that grew near the Dolna estate and brought the jungle-fowl. Pauline had already been given some shooting. She recognised the bird and could distinguish the brilliant tawny plumage as it tumbled in and out, or came fluttering to the ground where the seed had been scattered by the lavish hand of Nature. She could have bagged several brace of fowl, but to-day she was out for big game and it would not do to risk scaring away leopard and deer by firing at small game.

Burton had been indulging in a cigarette, supremely happy with his head on Fluffie's lap. He was tired after the long walk and glad to rest his legs. There was the walk home before him and possibly he might have

to escort Pauline and Fluffie a mile or so down the valley if the stag broke bay.

Fluffie had finished the last chocolate. She put the empty box in the basket, closed and strapped it. She was becoming restless under the restraint of Pauline's presence.

"I wish the hounds would come," she said.

Burton looked at his watch. It was just eight o'clock.

"They won't be long now if they have found. The stag must have given them a long run. Of course there is always the possibility of it going in another direction from the one we hope it will take. If so we shall see nothing of it."

"And then?" asked Fluffie.

"Oh then we must go home."

"Let's go home now. I'm tired of being here."

"We can't leave till we know for certain that they are not coming," said Pauline, and she glanced at Burton for confirmation.

"We must have patience. If we see nothing of the hounds for the next half hour I will ask the shikaree what he thinks about waiting any longer," he said, adding: "It's very pleasant here. I could stop all day. This is much nicer than standing out in the sun seeing that the pruners and weeders are not scamping the work."

Fluffie rose to her feet and shook her skirt. She was

surrounded with a circle of silver paper scraps the debris from the chocolate box.

"I see some flowers over there," she said, indicating the river. "Come and help me to gather them, Harry."

Quite willing he rose to do her bidding. The flowers were growing on an old stump of a tree. They were orchids, not unlike white cyclamen. Fluffie and Burton left the dry rock and went across the grass. Fluffie was very busy gathering a large handful. Suddenly she screamed and held out her hand in horror.

On the wrist were hanging two small, brown creatures. They were smooth and shiny in appearance.

"Leeches!" cried Burton. "Keep still while I take them off."

They were not easy to detach, having only just begun their feast of blood. The shikaree hearing her scream guessed what had happened. He ran up, took the loathsome creatures in his finger and thumb and relieved her of them.

"Come back, quick! to the rock where Miss Laurison is sitting, before you are attacked by any more," said Burton.

No need to tell her twice to do so. She was off like a young goat, holding out her hand. Two thin streams of blood slowly trickled down to her finger-tips and dripped. It was not a pleasant sight.

The shikaree and Burton followed. The old man stooped down and took another leech from her silk-

stockinged leg, a fourth from her ankle. Each left a spot of blood that grew larger under her terrified gaze. The stocking was no protection.

"Leeches! leeches!" she screamed, clinging to Burton. "I'm sure I feel a hundred crawling up my legs. Oh what shall I do?"

Pauline tried in vain to reassure her. She was in the throes of a panic and refused to be comforted even by Burton. An army of leeches came before her mental vision. Burton did his best to console her and bound up her wrist in his handkerchief. A dinner napkin from the tiffin basket served as a bandage for the leg and ankle. A leech-bite is not easily staunched; and soon the stain showed through the bandages.

"I can't stay, Pauline. I must go home," cried Fluffie, looking down at the tell-tale spots.

"There is nothing to be frightened at, really," said Burton. "The bleeding will stop in time."

It was of no use. She was determined to go and because her companions did not fall in at once with her request the tears came.

"You had better see her home, Mr. Burton," said Pauline.

"Would you mind very much if we left you. I am sure it would be best," replied Burton. "You will have the shikaree and your syce. I don't think that you will be obliged to wait long now."

She assured him that she would be quite happy by

herself. Fluffie's pony and syce were called up and Burton lifted his weeping little lady-love into her saddle, her arms clinging to him and her tears bedewing his cheek.

"Have you heard the hounds?" asked Pauline of him before he left.

"Not a sound. I am very much afraid that the hunt has not gone as Prince would like. However we can't help it. The shikaree will bring you safe home."

"How long shall I give them?"

"Another hour at most. I think you will find the old man quite ready by that time to go home."

Fluffie stopped crying. She was getting her way and there was no need for more tears.

"I am so sorry to leave you, Pauline," she said, looking more pleased than she had been since they started. "I really must go. I feel as if I should bleed to death if I stop here."

"Don't worry your little head about me," returned Pauline. "Good-bye. I shall probably be home between eleven and twelve."

She watched them as they climbed up to the jungle, Burton walking alongside with his arm round Fluffie as she sat in the saddle. As soon as they entered the forest he was obliged to fall back as there was only room to walk single file.

Pauline drew a little sigh of relief. She was glad to be left alone and have the beautiful valley to herself.

Fluffie's heart was not in the hunting and she would never appreciate the advantages of living so near the jungle. If she screamed at a leech, what would she have done at the sight of a leopard? She would have shrieked at it and driven it back to the forest.

The shikaree returned to the distant rhododendron tree. He had lost half his audience but the spirit of gossip was equally inspired by the half that remained, to wit Pauline's syce. They settled down in comfort on their heels and resumed, the one his tale, the other his responsive grunts.

Pauline left to herself resumed her seat, content to be alone with her thoughts which were pleasant. Her rifle lay close at hand on the rug that was spread over the rock. The spot was well chosen by the shikaree, dry and free from the blood-thirsty little pests that had driven poor Fluffie off the scenes.

Occasionally she listened intently for the sound of the horn and the baying of the hounds. Everything was quiet except for the voices of the forest, the cries of the birds, the wind brushing the grass as it swept by in gusts and the distant call of the foraging monkeys.

She was alone with the forest and it seemed to her as though the forest was aware that she was its honoured guest and smiled its welcome in the brilliant morning light.

No time was lost by Prince and his friends in getting away into the jungle with the hounds. They followed a different track from that which Pauline and Fluffie had taken.

The boundary of the estate on one side was a stream which issued from the forest above and ran past the tea-covered slopes. Deprived of its leafy shade as soon as it entered the estate, it was fully exposed to sight like a naked fugitive. Its banks had been despoiled of its ferns and flowers, its shrubs and forest trees. Even the sound of its voice burbling over shingle, rushing round boulders and roaring in cascades over rocky barriers was changed. It had lost its mystery and its music.

Above the slopes of tea where the hand of man had not touched it, the stream still wore its mantle of jungle. Game tracks radiated from its pools to the feeding grounds and the lairs on the ridges where the deer lay hidden during the heat of the day.

The hounds were uncoupled, the seizers only being held in leash. Quietly they pushed forward searching for a fresh scent.

After a mile or so of stiff climbing by game tracks,

Diana, one of the older hounds, whimpered. She had picked up a line that satisfied her. The freshness of the scent indicated that the stag was not far off, and Prince made an accurate guess that it was somewhere on the ridge above them.

He was right. It had been feeding with a couple of hinds since three in the morning. They were lying down where they were tolerably free from the tormenting fly.

The hounds took up the scent, led by Diana. The whimpers of excitement changed to a deeper note as confidence increased.

The view halloo when the hounds break into full cry is not attainable in elk-hunting. The hunting has to be done in the dense jungle entirely by scent. The only moment when the hounds see their prey is when it comes to bay, too winded to go farther. Then if they have any breath left, the hounds may break into the chorus so dear to the huntsmen's ears. While they are working they are not altogether silent but the tonguing is apt to be fitful.

The stag sprang to his feet as its ear caught the sound of Diana's voice. It stood motionless for a few seconds, sniffing the air and listening intently. The two hinds crept away to a rampart of rocks where they hoped to find safety in the thick jungle that hid the caves and crevices.

The stag bounded off, taking a line that it believed

would enable it to out-distance its pursuers. It passed up a ravine, where the going was better than on the steep hillside, and followed the course of one of the innumerable mountain streams that even in the hot season are never quite dry. It kept to the shallow bed with the instinct that the scent might be lost in the running water. Rocks obstructed its path and obliged it to climb out of the ravine and breast another ridge. On the top of the ridge it found a stretch of pat'na and for half a mile it sped over tussocks of grass by tracks that were familiar.

Here it got away from the hounds that were still pushing through the dense jungle. They were held up by thorn bushes and tangled undergrowth which the stag took at a leap in its stride.

The hounds reached the open ground and gave tongue. The sound of the distant baying struck terror to the heart of the stag. It dashed into the forest again and plunged down a steep declivity, descending into another mountain stream running through a little glade.

Winded it paused here, prepared to fight with antlers and hoofs should the hounds reach it before it recovered its wind.

Prince, keeping the younger hounds from straggling, and trusting to old Diana not to lose the scent or to be tempted to take up another, caught sight of the stag in the stream. His heart bounded with a thrill

of satisfaction as he recognised that Diana had chosen the right line and had not been led astray by the hinds. It was as fine a beast as he had ever secured in his former hunts. What a magnificent head to present to Pauline!

The hounds worked their way out of the jungle and went down the steep slope of the glade at full speed. The stag had recovered its wind. It faced the semi-circle of hounds gathered round the edge of the pool in which it stood.

In vain the unleashed seizers sprang at its ears. A pointed hoof sent one of them, gashed and bleeding into the water. The other of a lesser courage held back.

Then with a mighty leap the stag cleared the hounds and breasted the hill on the opposite side. It plunged into the forest, picked up a familiar game track and disappeared.

Prince knew the line it was taking. Unless anything unforeseen occurred to head it off, the stag would come to a final bay near the spot at which he had posted Pauline and Fluffie. They would have a clear view of the kill below them.

His companions were not far behind. The going had been stiff and the distance they had covered amounted to five miles at least, perhaps more. No part of the run was on the level. It was all up and down, rising some thousand feet and descending again six

or eight hundred. Once more the stag was leading them up a ridge at an elevation that would try the lungs of hounds and men in the rarefied air.

Prince sounded his horn and kept the pack together until the scent had been picked up on the other side of the stream. The ascent was not difficult to accomplish but the new bit of jungle was obstructed by rock and trailing vegetation, patches of brambles, dense beds of nilloo and rank-growing ferns that hid the treacherous, uneven ground beneath. A careless step could easily have given a follower a sprained ankle.

The stag in its frantic efforts to escape was not keeping to a beaten track but was making short cuts, known to itself but confusing to the huntsmen. This caused troublesome checks and delays, and gave the stag a distinct advantage. Prince was afraid lest he should not be up in time to kill at the spot where Pauline was stationed, in which case the stag, regaining its wind, might get away into country where it would be impossible to follow.

It was some twenty minutes after Fluffie and Burton had left that Pauline's attention was attracted by the sight of a flock of pigeons. The birds took wing and flew above the jungle behind her, their bronze plumage glinting in the sunlight. Something must have startled them. She listened but could hear nothing but their warning cries.

There was a movement in the nilloo, a crashing of

breaking stems and thrusting aside of the undergrowth. A magnificent sambur, snorting heavily, burst out into the open. It began to lope with stumbling gait towards her. It caught sight of the pony and syce and turned down to the river. There it plunged into the water below the cascade.

It stopped with its back to the rock over which the foam fell in a hundred silvery streams. Gallant and game, unable for the minute to go farther, it took its stand ready to face its pursuers if they came up before it recovered its wind. Its sides heaved, its nostrils were distended and its eyes were starting from its head in deadly fear.

Pauline looked round for the hounds that should have been on its heels. Not a sign of them could she detect. She listened. The forest was silent except for the birds and the wind that ruffled the tops of the trees.

She glanced towards the shikaree and the syce. Their whisperings had ceased. They were regarding the stag in silence, afraid to stir or speak. She understood the reason for their behaviour. Any movement might head the stag back into the jungle.

The sight of the sambur thrilled her. She was practically alone with it. The two Indians counted for nothing. It was hers and belonged to her. Was she not in a forest where there were no rights or reservations?

As she gazed, it stirred. It began to tread the shallow

water angrily with returning courage and breath. Its mane bristled into a fringe round its neck with rage and fright. It meant to fight for its life if its legs could not save it from its pursuers.

Pauline noted with dismay that it was recovering. It was able to walk down the bed of the river to the spot where the stream spread out into pools. The banks at this point were low. It would be easy for it to wade out if it wished to leave the stream after throwing off the scent in the running water.

Was it on the point of escaping?

It could not be a stag that the hounds were following. Otherwise they would have been up with it by this time.

No; it was a chance sambur that had been disturbed by the hounds as they had followed another, and it was sneaking off to safety down the valley.

In the clear morning light she could see its antlers, a magnificent pair that would rouse the envy of any sportsman who desired to possess big game trophies acquired by his own gun.

Pauline had risen to her feet on its appearance. Suddenly it sprang out of the river on to the low grassy bank and went off at a brisk trot down the valley.

Urged by an irresistible impulse to prevent what she believed to be its escape, she raised her rifle, took steady aim and fired.

At that moment the hounds reached the edge of the

jungle. One by one they wormed their way out, too winded to tongue. Some of them were scratched by the thorny undergrowth through which they had struggled and showed a patch of blood here and there.

They were not in line but pushed their way into the open at different points a few yards from each other. They were cheered on by Prince and the kennelmen who were not far behind. Diana was still leading.

Prince felt certain from past experience that he would find the stag at bay in the river. He again released the seizers as he reached the edge of the jungle. As he did so he heard the crack of the rifle.

The sound electrified him. He burst through the last obstruction and landed on the grass. He bounded forward a few paces and then stopped dead. The stag was exactly where he anticipated it would be.

As he gazed it stumbled, pitched forward and rolled on its side. He was not sure if he had shouted at Pauline. Anyway he was too late. The mischief was done and there was no undoing it.

Then she turned, and for the first time saw the hounds coming down from the jungle towards the river. One after another Prince's fellow-huntsmen appeared. They had also heard the shot and had wondered what it meant. They stopped dead at the sight of the sambur lying on the bank of the river. They were scarcely able to believe their eyes. Never in all their hunting days had such a thing happened. It was incredible.

The stag had been shot in the face of the hounds.

No man dared to speak. Explanations were unnecessary. They could read the story of the tragedy for themselves although they had not seen it enacted. They recognised the person who had been guilty of the unpardonable offence.

She stood there red-handed, the smoking rifle in her grip, staring at Prince.

As she gazed he seemed to come out of a trance. Slowly he approached while the rest of the field hung back in consideration for his feelings. Angry as they were, every one of them, they were full of commiseration. Had she been a man they would not have been surprised to see him lift his hand.

She was a woman. No physical punishment could be meted out. Her sex protected her.

Pauline realised when it was too late the enormity of her crime. It was a shock. As Prince came up to her she said in a clear hard voice that covered her regret.

"Sorry! My mistake!"

She had better have kept silence. His eyes blazed. His hands clenched. Murder was in his face but he held himself in check. His speech he could not control.

"You——!"

He got no farther. The bitter epithet with the swear word was bitten down and silenced on his tongue. That she should have committed such a crime as to fire in front of hounds was unpardonable wherever it might

happen; but to do this before him and his friends was an outrageous, intolerable insult, one that he could never forgive.

It was hard to believe it of her but there lay the stag as proof. The hounds, no longer tonguing, were gathering round it in anticipation. The field was standing about disconsolately, wishing to a man that they were at home. The kennelman with his assistant dog-boys was already busy over the last ghastly act by which the hounds received their reward.

A pause ensued. Pauline broke the silence.

"I had better go," she said.

"Go to Hell!" he cried passionately.

Again with a gigantic effort he checked the torrent of furious speech that was on his tongue. He swung round on his heel and strode towards the hounds, knowing that there was safety for him only in removing himself from her presence. With trembling hands he began to couple them preparatory to their return to kennels.

Pauline's eyes followed him. The colour fled from her face. She realised that she had received her dismissal. Whether her crime was pardonable or not she felt that she could not forgive his words nor his manner of saying them. Her temper was good but it had its bounds. She had never in her life been sworn at. She could not tolerate it now. She might merit severe reproach but the words he used were not in the form

of a reproach. They were common low-class abuse which under no conditions whatever should be addressed to a woman.

She could not see eye to eye with him in the matter of killing the stag. Had the hounds been up she would never have fired. But she believed that the stag was escaping. She had recognised the fact that it was an exceptionally fine head, such as she would be for ever proud to number among the trophies that had fallen to her own gun. She had the ardent longing of the beginner; the urge to acquire at any price.

Too intent on the stag to notice anything else, she had failed to see the hounds. She knew that the jungle harboured many stags. She gave herself no time to think that this might be the one which had been followed. She remembered nothing but the wonderful opportunity offered. She seized it with no thought for anything but the fulfilment of her desire and sacrificed the greater passion for the lesser.

PAULINE rode back to Glendee in a kind of nightmare. The trip outward with all its rare jungle sights had been a joy. Birds, butterflies, ferns, flowers, nothing had escaped her eye. Now she seemed blind. Her brain was numb; it refused to act. Once or twice she found the syce leading the pony by the rein. If she had been alone she would have wandered off the right track and lost her way.

During those two hours in the saddle she had time to recover herself to a great extent. The immediate future loomed large. She must get away to Kandy as soon as possible, the day after to-morrow at the latest. By the time she reached the bungalow her mind was in less of a chaos. She could think and plan.

Fluffie had arrived and had apparently confessed. Burton had stopped at his bungalow but was coming to the breakfast-lunch that would be ready at half-past eleven. Mrs. Macdonald looked happy but was opposed to a regular engagement on the plea that Fluffie was too young.

"Well!" cried Mrs. Macdonald, as Pauline came wearily up the veranda steps. "You have all been successful I hope?"

Pauline shook her head in reply.

"I hope the stag didn't get away," remarked Mrs. Macdonald, puzzled.

"No, it was killed all right," came the dull answer.

"Then what has happened? Nobody hurt I hope?"

Pauline hid nothing from her. In a few simple sentences she told the story, suppressing her own indignation even as she repeated his hot intemperate words. When she had finished Mrs. Macdonald said quietly:

"You were in the wrong, Pauline. I am afraid you were in the wrong."

"I may have been—but his abuse——!"

"I am not surprised that he lost his temper. Do you know what you were doing?"

"Nothing really wrong," Pauline replied uncertainly.

"I call it wrong. You were poaching, neither more nor less. As a sportswoman you know what that is."

"The jungle is not preserved. It is free to everyone who carries a gun licence."

"I don't deny your right to kill a sambur. You have as much right to do so as he has, and in your own way, too. But in this case it was a breach of etiquette, a bad breach. It was like shooting a fox in the face of the hounds. You know enough about foxhunting to be aware of the enormity of such an action."

Pauline had nothing to say to this except to acknowledge that she had been in the wrong.

"He gave me no opportunity to apologise or to explain."

"You couldn't explain away an offence like that."

"The stag came out alone. Neither hounds nor hunters were in sight. There was absolutely nothing to show that it was the hunted stag."

"All the same you ought not to have fired," persisted Mrs. Macdonald. Her sympathies as the wife of a man who hunted frequently were with Prince. She thought nothing of the fact that a few swear words escaped his lips under great provocation. Pauline would have to get used to the rough ways of the planters, although from what Mrs. Macdonald had seen of Prince she believed him to be a man who was not addicted to using strong language even when provoked.

"The stag was beginning to run away," said Pauline, who was feeling intensely sick about the whole incident. The momentary triumph was gone. The intense desire to kill the big beast herself had faded and left her with a strange feeling of disgust.

"The sambur would not have escaped. I know the spot where you were posted. I have seen more than one 'kill' myself from that point."

"But Lionel said himself that the stags did get away sometimes down the valleys, and once in the cultivated country it was impossible to follow."

"They very seldom escape unless the pack is weak. Just now I know that it is particularly strong, and the hounds were so close on its heels it must have been brought to bay only a little below where you were standing. I am very sorry this has happened."

"I could not bear to see it, as I believed, running away," said Pauline, still anxious to justify herself, although quite ready to be generous about it and admit that she had made a mistake.

Mrs. Macdonald forbore to pursue the subject of right or wrong. She could see that Pauline was distressed at the rupture that had occurred. It would have been cruel to continue blaming her. The deed was done and could not be undone. The next thing was to reconcile themselves to what must prove an intense disappointment to all concerned.

"Well! that's that," she said. "Perhaps it is as well under the circumstances that you have both discovered how hard it is for two of a trade to agree. The discovery would have been still more disastrous if it had not been made till after marriage."

"Two of a trade!" It was the expression Miss Vivyan had used and which Pauline at the time had slightly resented.

"In this case we ought to have agreed. Our tastes are identical. He ought to understand what a temptation it was," said Pauline miserably. There were tears in her eyes as she spoke.

Mrs. Macdonald's heart ached for her, but she had not much hope that a breach of the kind could be easily healed.

"I am sorry, very sorry, my dear. It is a loss to all of us. You would have been a delightful neighbour at Dolna. However, it can't be helped. It's done and we must make the best of it."

She sighed and her sigh was echoed by Pauline, for the prospective bride found no comfort in the recommendation to make the best of it. Her heart sank deeper than ever and hope died.

"I suppose things are past mending," Pauline said despondently.

"I have not much hope that Lionel Prince will forget although he may forgive. You must have hurt him deeply. He is a man of strong character. What he says, goes; and he is known to be firm in his decisions even to obstinacy."

"And I have my pride to consider. I can't live with a man who may round on me at any minute and swear at me."

"I am quite sure he would not do that. From what you tell me he seems to have sworn at you by implication. The words did not actually escape his lips."

"But he meant them! And he told me to go to Hell."

"My dear! we mean murder sometimes, but we don't do it."

"I think that I would rather be killed outright than cursed," replied Pauline with a wan smile, while her eyes were still moist with the tears she would not allow to fall.

There was a pause. Pauline had found no consolation in Mrs. Macdonald's words. The description given of Lionel's character was correct. By this time Pauline understood his temperament. He was undoubtedly masterful and swayed by strong emotions, but as a rule he had them well under control. With all his faults, if faults they were, he was a man to win the love of any woman. He was eminently suited to Pauline. She needed a strong nature and she recognised it in him. She would have despised weakness of any kind. His treatment of her had, if anything, strengthened her love for him, wrathful as it had made her.

She gave her engagement ring into Mrs. Macdonald's keeping, with a request that she would send it to Dolna after her departure. It was enclosed in an envelope with a sheet of paper on which Pauline wrote in her bold handwriting the words: "With apologies and regrets." This was all.

There was deep regret on her side. She believed that he would feel the same, as soon as his wrath went down. She offered apologies at the same time, but she was of the opinion that they were due to her more than to him.

Mrs. Macdonald gave her the impression that from

her point of view Lionel was not so much to blame. The provocation had been great.

Well! he might possibly be excused for losing his temper, but there was no justification for a man, in any circumstances whatever, to tell a lady that she might go to Hell. Never in her life had such language been addressed to her. It rankled in her memory and brought the hot blood to her face every time she recalled the words.

The truth nevertheless had to be faced. Pauline loved him and was keenly aware of the fact now that she had lost him. She loved him with all the strength of her womanhood.

They had been engaged four months. Although they had not been together, the love on both sides had grown and intensified. A woman of twenty-five does not let herself go, as a rule, with her eyes shut. She wants something more than a boy's devotion. In Prince she had found what she believed would satisfy her, and when the strong possessive love came she opened her arms to it unafraid and thanked God.

On his side Prince had given her as good as he had received. Confidently he had looked forward to a fulness of life that promised everything a man could desire. He had set her up on a pedestal. Nothing was too good for her. With all his heart he worshipped her.

And now a bolt from the blue had shattered the lives

of both, destroyed their dreams and hopes and devastated their world for them.

Neither had any hope of a reconciliation. His anger still burnt. Every time he recalled the scene—and he seemed never able to get away from it; it haunted him sleeping and waking—the fallen sambur, the girl with the rifle in her hands just as she had lowered it from her shoulder, her proud pose and self-possession, he felt his wrath boil again. He ascribed her action to selfishness. Herein he wronged her. It was selfish thoughtlessness which is not the same thing.

He determined that he must put her out of his thoughts altogether. Never again would he willingly set eyes on her. He would remain on the hills till she had left the Island.

The following day Mrs. Macdonald found an opportunity of sending the ring to Dolna. He read the words that Pauline had written on the slip of paper.

"Apology! regret!" he repeated. "As if she had merely failed to keep an appointment! I refuse to accept either!"

He pushed the diamond ring to the back of the drawer of his office writing-table in which he kept his cash. For a couple of hours he sat by his table brooding. During that time he decided on the course he intended to adopt.

He would show a bold front and let men see that the

incident was not going to wreck his life. It should be in truth but an incident and not a tragedy.

He sent out invitations for a big week-end hunt, appointing the meet at the Rest House on the Horton Plains. His guests were to go up on Friday afternoon, dine and sleep there; hunt all Saturday and the morning of the following day. In the evening they were to dine at Dolna and on Monday every man would be back at work. It was a sporting thing to do, and fully appreciated by his friends. They understood the call and rallied round him. The hunting was a great success. They had good runs and one of the guests, a newcomer, was allowed the honour of striking the quarry down. Prince presented him with the head which put the finishing touch to the pleasure and triumph.

This gathering helped to reinstate Prince on the old lines of his bachelorhood and restore in a great measure his equilibrium.

No mention was made of the previous hunt that had ended so disastrously. Mrs. Macdonald had been obliged to write and cancel the invitations that she had sent out. She gave no reason but it was understood that the marriage was broken off and would not take place. Dolna would not have a mistress. It would continue its hospitalities without the aid of a hostess, and Prince would pursue his well-regulated life as if Miss Pauline Laurison had never existed.

Regret on all sides was felt although it was not expressed to the man himself. For the short time that Pauline had been at Glendee people had discovered for themselves that she was an acquisition and just the wife for Prince. They would all have benefited by her presence at Dolna. It would have created a new centre of social gaiety that would have been welcome.

Although Prince succeeded in presenting an unchanged front to his friends, he suffered in private. There were times when he could neither rest nor sleep. In vain he plunged into work on the estate until Burton complained that he was doing his assistant's duties as well as his own. In vain he took out the hounds, followed them through bad country, searched indefatigably when they strayed or were lost; organised jungle-fowl shoots or took himself off to throw a fly for the rainbow trout in the streams of the Horton Plains. His activities were not successful in allaying his restlessness nor in suppressing the intense longing that occasionally took him by the throat and wellnigh overwhelmed him.

It came suddenly and when he least expected it. He craved to hear her voice, her laugh, her footstep. He passionately longed to feel her firm young athletic body yielding to the pressure of his arms. His lips ached for the warm, ardent, responsive kiss that he had himself taught her to give.

A sense of intense loneliness overtook him at intervals

when his outdoor activities ceased. A violent impulse seized him that was difficult to resist. He felt impelled to go to her, pray for her forgiveness for his outrageous words and beg her to marry him, to put an end to his misery. No matter if they did not always agree. Their points of disagreement would be trivial compared with the great issue at stake. Only as man and wife, he was convinced, could they find the happiness that made life worth living.

His was not a nature to accept substitutes. When his desire was set upon an object nothing less than the real thing would satisfy him. With the exception of Mrs. Macdonald he avoided the society of women. Nor was he inclined to drown his sorrows in drink. Always abstemious he became even more so as he found alcohol an irritant rather than a sedative.

Already the edge of his wrath was wearing down. Like all men of generous nature his anger might burn furiously at the time of its being roused, but it did not endure. He could lose his head in a blind fury, but he could neither sulk nor be vindictive. He was ready to heal the breach as soon as the flame of his wrath died out.

At the end of ten days he sought Mrs. Macdonald. He opened the subject with composure.

"Can you tell me if Pauline has gone to England yet?" he asked.

"I think not," was the reply.

"Perhaps she has joined her uncle and aunt in the Central Provinces."

"Mr. Hayes left India when Pauline came to us."

He was silent for a while. Mrs. Macdonald gave him time to say what was in his mind. She had very little hope that the breach would be mended. Both had strong characters not easily influenced.

"Is she still in the Island?" he asked.

As he put the question his heart gave a sudden throb. Could it be possible that Pauline was waiting for him to make the first advance towards a reconciliation? The thought startled him. He was not certain at the moment that he was prepared to make it.

"I believe she is in Ceylon," was the reply.

"You have heard from her?"

"She wrote about some luggage I have sent off for her. It was arranged that it should go to a shipping agent in Colombo. She asked me to forward it to the hotel in Kandy instead, as she is uncertain about her date of sailing."

"I gather from what you tell me that she is staying on at the hotel."

Mrs. Macdonald made no reply. Prince glanced at her with swift inquiry. She seemed curiously reticent. She had not recovered from her annoyance, he thought; Pauline had behaved badly to her hostess as well as to himself.

"I wonder how long Pauline means to stay at Kandy."

Mrs. Macdonald made no answer to this. It was not a question.

"Kandy is a very dull place to live in unless one has business there. She doesn't care for sight-seeing," he remarked. "One wants a companion for it."

While he was speaking Mrs. Macdonald was considering what course she ought to take. She looked at him and hesitated. Should she tell him all that she knew or should she keep silence? He spoke again.

"Have you any notion how long she will be in Kandy."

She thought she detected a note of hope in his voice. Was he contemplating a run down to Kandy with a view to a reconciliation? Nothing but disappointment could come of it if he took such a course, for Pauline had left Kandy. Mrs. Macdonald decided that she must as a friend tell him the truth.

"Pauline writes from the Moodaliyar Hondara's house near Kandy where she is staying. She doesn't say how long she will be there."

She ceased speaking as though the subject was ended, as indeed it was; ended with a deadness that was of the nature of a shock for Prince. She recalled the friendly relations that had existed between the English girl and the Cingalese nobleman. Prince had never liked

it, but after he and Pauline had come to an understanding, the little spark of jealousy had died out. Would it be revived? It ought not to come to life again. Pauline had never allowed her friendliness towards her table-companion to merge into familiarity or to change its character in any degree. She had always maintained her dignity even when it was apparent that the Moodaliyar admired her.

Mrs. Macdonald was herself surprised to hear that she had accepted an invitation to become the guest of the Moodaliyar, and she wondered how it could have been brought about unless Pauline had written and asked for it; an action she found difficult to credit her with.

The news was a species of shock to Prince, for the reason that he had allowed himself to speculate on Pauline's object for lingering in Ceylon. He was correct in saying that sight-seeing had no attraction for her. Then what was she waiting for? Could it be possible that she was waiting for him? Was she giving him time to make the first advance?

His heart had stirred as the thought flashed through him that possibly the door, after all, was not closed irrevocably on their happiness. If he could have been assured that Pauline was ready to meet him halfway, he would have been off to Kandy that very evening.

Then came the blow. Mrs. Macdonald's information

had abruptly extinguished every particle of hope. If Pauline could seek for consolation and distraction in the company of the Moodaliyar, she was not the kind of woman to suit him. He must give up all dreams of reconciliation.

His brooding was broken into by Mrs. Macdonald, who had taken her place before the tea-tray. She was sorry for him.

"Let me give you a cup of tea," she said.

He rose abruptly.

"Thanks, I won't stay. I am making a break of tea and must be back in the factory by six."

"You have a good tea-maker I understand."

"A first-rate man; but he is first-rate because Burton or I keep our eyes upon him."

He went as far as the door and returned.

"By-the-bye, Mrs. Macdonald, I have never properly thanked you for all your kindness to me—and—er—to Pauline. May I give Fluffie the pony that I bought for Pauline? I have my own horse and the car. The pony is eating its head off in the stable."

"That's very good of you. If you can spare it, it will be most acceptable."

Mrs. Macdonald sent a servant to ask her daughter to come in.

"Fluffie is playing tennis with your S.D., Mr. Burton. He seems very pleasant."

"A thoroughly good fellow in every way," responded

Prince warmly. "He is making himself very comfortable in his new bungalow. I am not asking him to return to his old quarters with me. I prefer to be alone. You mustn't ask him to live by himself too long."

Mrs. Macdonald smiled. She understood what he meant.

"We haven't got as far as that yet. Fluffie wants to be engaged but she is full young, barely nineteen."

"As long as she knows her mind, I don't think it matters."

The couple entered by way of the long french window opening into the garden. At the same time Mr. Macdonald came in from the office in quest of tea. He greeted Prince and they plunged at once into estate talk.

Fluffie was told of the offer and was beside herself with delight. She had no pony of her own but used her father's when he could spare it. Not being as young as he was, he often rode when he had to go to the outskirts of his estate. She embarrassed Prince altogether by rushing at him and giving him an impetuous kiss, at which everybody laughed.

"After that I think I had better go," he said. "Or I shall have my head punched," he added, with a glance at Burton.

"All right, carry on, old man, I don't mind!" was the good-humoured rejoinder.

"You are a darling!" cried Fluffie unabashed.

"Not yours, my child, if what your mother tells me is true. I'll send the pony down to-morrow morning," he said as he made his escape.

On the second morning after the unhappy breach between the two lovers Pauline departed. She was sick at heart and ready to join Fluffie in her tears. To the very last Fluffie hoped against hope that the difference might be made up.

"Do let me go and tell Mr. Prince that you are sorry," she pleaded.

"But am I honestly sorry? If temptation came I might do it again."

"No you wouldn't. You couldn't do it again now you understand how much it hurt him."

Pauline did not reply. Perhaps the soft-hearted girl was right; but no one can gauge his or her power to resist temptation until the trial comes.

With a wan smile in which happiness found no part, Pauline thanked her hostess for her many kindnesses. The usual hopes were expressed that they might meet again some time in the future, but even while the words were spoken they were all aware that the chances were very remote of her paying them another visit. She felt that she was saying good-bye not only to Mrs. Macdonald but to the beautiful smiling hills and forests that had taken such a hold upon her heart.

She was to catch the day-train down to Kandy. It was not a long journey. The Macdonald's car, driven by the chauffeur, took her to the station. As she passed down the long winding road her eyes lingered on the slopes of the hills, lying in the brilliant early morning sunshine.

For a short distance the crests of the ridges were crowned with jungle. The primeval growth disappeared before the efforts of the planters, and smooth evergreen ridges and valleys stretched on either side. Only twenty-four hours ago she was climbing up through the fresh dewy forest at the far end of the valley.

She turned in her seat and looked back at the mountain mass. She fancied she could distinguish the upper slopes of Dolna lying against the line of jungle. A turn in the road as it took her round a great shoulder of tea hid the distant hills. She glanced back two or three times but the view was lost. She had looked her last on the pleasant spot where she had hoped to make her home.

The heat increased as she gradually descended and the breeze lost its freshness. At the station she was glad to throw off the top coat she had worn for the drive.

Established in the first-class compartment, which she had to herself, she sat at the window, her eyes dwelling on the beautiful landscape. The morning had lost its crisp invigorating atmosphere, but it was

none the less exquisite because of the lower elevation. Palms, cycads and sub-tropical shrubs took the place of the keena and sapu trees.

Pauline decided to break her journey at Kandy. She was not obliged to go down to Colombo until she had arranged for her passage. She intended to travel home by the line that had brought her out. The steamers were running once a fortnight. As far as she could make out from the notices, she had just missed the last and would have to wait twelve or thirteen days for the next.

On her arrival at Kandy she took a conveyance and drove to the Queen's Hotel where she had no difficulty in finding accommodation.

Pauline was just beginning to awaken from the ugly dream in which she had been living since she and Prince parted. Her life she discovered had suddenly lost its light. It had become dull and purposeless.

It was not until she reached the hotel that she realised that it mattered nothing to her nor to anyone else where she went or what she did with herself; whether she travelled farther east or back again to the west.

The link with India was broken through the departure of her uncle on sick leave. She knew no one in that country to whom she could go. The only person who had given her an invitation was Ayton, a bachelor, leading a camp life in the wilds of Burma.

Any other spot that was possible to reach—Cashmere in the north, the Douars, the Berars, or Mysore in the south—were closed to the free-lance who had no companion and what was still more important, no one in a position to give advice or assistance.

She began to understand the extent of her isolation. Anyone bent on sport in Asia needs friends to point the way. Something more is required than a couple of rifles and a cartridge-bag.

There appeared on the face of it no alternative but to return to England. The prospect was not attractive. She had let her house and the shooting for five years. How could she reconcile herself to settling down just to wait till the end of the period? She must have an anchorage and occupation of some kind.

People who have the wide world open to them find it far more difficult to choose a spot in which to settle than those who for private reasons must fix on some definite centre. A town she could not endure. It must be country. She might go yachting, reaching Norway where both fishing and shooting were to be found. But to do this alone was not attractive. The yachting could only last for the summer and then—what?

She wandered out of the hotel after lunch and walked by the lake. The place looked over-civilised. It was difficult to believe that wild beasts had ever come to its waters to drink; that the leopard had tracked the

sambur down to its margin and that wild elephants had trampled a path through forests to the top of the ridges.

She returned to the hotel and entered the long, deep veranda. Her eyes fell on a familiar figure strolling down towards her. She hastened towards him with a gladness in her eyes of which she was unaware, and held out her hand.

"Moodaliyar! This is an unexpected pleasure. You remember me? I was on board the *Lincolnshire* last autumn and we travelled out together."

"Of course I remember you, Miss Laurison; or may I call you Mrs. Prince? I am delighted to see you!" he said quickly.

"I am still Miss Laurison."

"Ah! is that so?" he changed the subject at once. "You were going on to a relative in Central India. I hope you had good sport."

"Excellent, and I bagged my tiger!"

"Good! I congratulate you. Was it a very exciting kill?"

She gave him a short account of her adventures. While he listened his eyes dwelt on her with a question in them. According to the avowed plan she was to return to Ceylon after she had paid her visit to India and be married to Prince about this time. Pauline read the question he was too well bred to ask.

"My engagement is broken off. Mr. Prince and I have discovered on further acquaintance that we could not fulfil it. I am on my way home to England."

The Moodaliyar was slightly embarrassed. He was not sure if he ought to condole with her. After a slight pause he said:

"I am sorry. I hoped that we should have had you permanently in the Island."

"It is a fascinating country and I am sorry to leave it," she replied evenly.

He recovered his self-possession.

"You have decided to return to England?"

"There is nothing else to be done. I came out to shoot a tiger and I have accomplished it. Now I must go home."

"You are in no hurry?"

"None whatever. I am waiting for the sister ship of the *Lincolnshire* which will be at Colombo in a fortnight's time."

"This leaves you free to pay me a visit, I hope," he said with a raising of his mobile eyebrows.

"Yes!" she answered in quick response and with a sudden lifting of the gloom that had been oppressing her. "I am quite free to go wherever I please."

"Are you staying on here at this hotel until the boat comes in?"

"I thought of doing so for the few days."

"Then you will have plenty of time to put in your visit to me," he replied with a satisfaction he did not attempt to hide. "I shall be able to give you a few days' shooting in the low country. You couldn't be here at a better season for it."

She thanked him warmly, but did not commit herself definitely.

"I will think it over. I need not say how much I should like to have the opportunity of doing a little more shooting."

She said nothing about the sambur that had already fallen to her rifle. The incident was best buried in oblivion.

"I shall be very pleased if you will come," he replied.

"Now tell me what you have been doing in Burma. You say that you have just arrived from there," said Pauline.

He went on to describe his visit. He had gone to Burma for polo and racing. He took six horses and ponies over and made some satisfactory wins on the race-course."

"How did the ponies stand the sea voyage across?"

"Very well indeed. I didn't bring them back but sold them for what they would fetch."

They spoke of the Burma passengers, some of whom he had met.

"I am returning home the day after to-morrow. I

will drive you there if you will allow me. It is only a matter of thirty miles, an hour's drive."

She did not reply immediately. He divined the reason for her hesitation. English women, he knew, did not accept the hospitality of bachelors. Without any sign of confusion, he continued in a perfectly natural manner.

"My mother will be pleased and proud to have you as a visitor. She lives by herself with an English lady, Miss Capell, who is her companion."

"She has you of course," said Pauline.

"I occupy another bungalow."

"You are not living with her?"

"My ancestral home, as I suppose you would call it in England, consists of a group of bungalows standing together in the same grounds. I have my own quarters with a staff of servants. My mother has hers. There are two other bungalows. In one I put up the English friends who honour me with visits. In the other my Cingalese relatives occasionally stay. I have my stables with an English trainer named Watson. He has his bungalow of course and his English family. You will be my mother's guest—if you will come."

"I will gladly come! It is most kind of you to invite me," responded Pauline without further hesitation. He was making it easy for her to accept.

"And you will allow me to drive you there?"

"With pleasure." Something in her voice convinced

him that she spoke from her heart. The invitation was timely and acceptable.

"I am staying here," he continued. "We shall meet at dinner. May I tell the waiter to put me at your table?"

She readily assented, adding that it would be like old times.

"We shall fancy ourselves on board ship again," she said.

"A pleasant thought! It was a privilege sitting next you; one I valued."

The world seemed suddenly brighter for Pauline. The depressing solitude and friendlessness were gone. The Moodaliyar had given his invitation with a courtesy that had touched her. He had made it all possible and easy without asking her to go beyond the conventions that an Englishwoman should respect. There was nothing in his arrangements to which she could take exception.

The dinner gong sounded and Pauline went into the dining saloon. She found the Moodaliyar there awaiting her. He was dressed as usual in European evening dress. He wore his hair cut after the fashion of an Englishman.

They sat down. In the centre of their table which was laid for only two, was a magnificent bunch of roses and tuberose lilies. Pauline's eyes rested approvingly on them. She glanced round the room. Several

people were dining, but no table was similarly decorated.

"I am honoured," she remarked. "I wonder why."

"The flowers are from my garden. They were brought in by one of my peons on a motor bike. They are freshly cut."

"As I can see for myself! How good of you!" and she thanked him warmly as she detached a half blown Mareschal Niel rose from the bouquet and pinned it in her dress.

"I telephoned to my mother that I was bringing her a visitor," he said. "She begged me to tell you that she is delighted. It is very good of you, she added in her reply, to spare some of your time for an old lady like herself."

Pauline expressed her gratitude and led the conversation away to other subjects, polo in Colombo and racing at Darrawella. She made a good listener.

There was one point on which she was silent and this was her visit up-country to Mrs. Macdonald. He respected her reticence and asked no questions. He would not have been human if his curiosity had not been roused. It puzzled him more than a little why a man of Prince's discernment should allow anything in the world to come between himself and such a woman as Pauline Laurison.

Where did the fault lie? Not with her, he felt assured.

Prince must have given offence of some sort. What could it be? She dropped no hint to lead him to suppose that she had been deceived in any way, or disappointed.

He did not offer to sit with her after dinner. Having seen her to the lounge and found her a comfortable seat he excused himself.

"I will say good night. I have promised to join a party of friends in the smoking-room." He lingered by her chair a few seconds. "Sure that I can't get you anything?"

"Nothing, thanks. They are turning on the wireless. I shall not be dull."

Still he stayed. He had something more to say. She glanced up at him with encouragement.

"Will you ride with me to-morrow morning?" he asked a little diffidently. "I have a horse here that will carry you well."

She accepted the offer at once.

"What time will you start?"

"Will half-past six be too early?" he inquired.

"Not a bit. I will meet you in the veranda at that time."

Pauline was feeling more grateful than he knew. His friendship brought back a little content and happiness. The soreness she had felt ever since her solitary ride home from the disastrous scene on the river bank, was softened.

The Moodaliyar had conjured up some of the zest and enthusiasm for sport that had been extinguished temporarily by the fatal killing of the sambur.

THE day following the ride, the Moodaliyar drove Pauline to his house. They left Kandy in the afternoon, an hour after lunch. Here again he showed a discrimination that she appreciated.

He drove the car himself, his Cingalese chauffeur sitting by his side. Pauline had the back seat to herself. It was a large hooded touring car. The hood was thrown open and she had a clear view to right and left. If she wished to speak to him she could lean forward and do so.

They climbed out of the hollow of the hills in which the town of Kandy is built. The pretty little bungalows, half hidden in their gardens of sub-tropical flowers and shrubs, were soon lost sight of and the shining lake with its temple of the sacred tooth.

The road, as usual in Ceylon, was good. In places the afternoon sun bathed it with warm, golden light. In other spots the broad, deep shadows of palm groves lay across it. Sugar plantations, coffee and cocoa gardens, rice fields, swamps, bamboos and fruit trees grew in luxuriant profusion.

The gardens and plantations were owned by

Cingalese. Little or no pruning was done. It was a very different scene from that of the tea estates where the Englishman was the cultivator. He trimmed and weeded as if his holding was a public park.

The ridges above the cultivated valleys of the Kandy district are still crowned with jungle; perennial streams flow everywhere, finding their way to the lake or down to the low country. Here and there the hills open out and give a view of the foot-hills and the warm undulating ground between the hills and the sea.

A turn in the road as they glided along the smooth, narrow highway, revealed a distant view that called forth an exclamation from Pauline. The Moodaliyar slowed down and gave her the story of the country they overlooked. Other places he pointed out, and about each spot he had something interesting to say.

All too soon, it seemed to her, the drive through a tropical fairyland came to an end. The car turned into parklike private grounds thickly studded with trees. A winding carriage drive bordered with palms and feathery groups of bamboos led them to a bungalow.

The Moodaliyar pulled up under a deep portico where the passion flower and the blue plumbago formed a bower of foliage and blossom. A broad flight of steps led into a cool, spacious veranda.

At the sound of the motor horn a Cingalese butler appeared and made a deep salaam. He had no turban. His black glossy hair was knotted at the back and on

his head was the semi-circular comb worn after the fashion of the Cingalese of the hills, a proud people who claim to have the blood of princes in their veins.

Following came a second and a third man, who also greeted their master with a ceremony that might have been accorded to royalty. They descended the steps and at a sign from the butler they took Pauline's luggage from the car and carried it into the house.

An English lady with grey hair advanced from a room that opened into the veranda. She held out both hands to Hondara, her smile and the warm light in her blue eyes betraying the pleasure she felt in seeing him again.

"Hallo! Miss Capell!" he cried, as he took her hands and lifted them to his lips. "Here I am back again from the far East. I have brought Miss Laurison, as I promised."

"Welcome, Moodaliyar. Your mother is looking forward to seeing you." She turned to Pauline and held out a hand. "And you, too, Miss Laurison. We don't need an introduction. We have heard all about you and your wonderful shooting in India. Come in, both of you. Tea is just ready in the drawing-room and her Excellency is waiting for you."

She led the way and Pauline followed. A middle-aged lady, of a pale olive complexion, advanced with a smile. She was robed in lavender colour and wore pearls. She was still a beautiful woman.

"How good of you, Miss Laurison, to pay a visit to an old lady like me living in the depths of the country," she said in fluent English. She seated herself near a table that bore a large bowl of roses. Round the bowl were a number of small vases that were full of Neapolitan violets. The air was filled with the scent. Hondara came and bent over her.

"My lovely mother!" he said softly as he touched her hair with his lips. "How have you been while I have been away?"

"Very well indeed, my son."

The butler brought in the pot of tea and placed it on the tray. Miss Capell dropped into a chair before the tray and poured out the tea. The Moodaliyar pushed a chair near to his mother and signed to Pauline to take it.

"My mother is a little deaf. She will be able to talk to you in comfort if you will sit here."

There were cakes and scones, bread and butter and sweets of various kinds.

"Ah!" exclaimed the Moodaliyar as he helped himself from a dish handed by the butler. "Cucumber sandwiches for me! Good! Try one, Miss Laurison."

"The cook hasn't forgotten the touch of anchovy, has he?" asked his mother.

"No, they are as good as ever." He turned to Pauline. "I used to be treated to these on my return from school as a boy. My mother can't think of me as

anything else but a schoolboy, Miss Laurison. Early greed should be forgiven and forgotten—but I still love these things," he concluded as he helped himself to a couple more.

While Pauline drank her tea she glanced round at the room. It was large and lofty. The ceiling was made of beautiful parquetry work in the rare woods of Ceylon, now almost extinct—satinwood, calamander, ebony a hundred years old and not procurable in these days.

The furniture, some of it in Dutch design, was also old. It had been kept with scrupulous care and bore a wonderful polish. Pots of ferns and of various kinds of lilies filled flower-stands and on every table a display of cut flowers rejoiced the eye. A grand piano, open with a sheet of music set up, suggested recent use. Miss Capell noted Pauline's glance.

"Her Excellency—that is how we translate the Cingalese term for the Moodaliyar's mother—is fond of music."

"Does she play?"

"She used to do so. Now she prefers to leave it to me. The piano is not required quite so often, as we have the gramophone as well as the wireless. The Moodaliyar arranged for the extension and had it put up."

"Do you speak Cingalese?" Pauline asked.

"A few words; sufficient to make myself intelligible

to the servants. It is not necessary with her Excellency. She reads and writes English as well as speaks it."

Miss Capell's duties at the tea table were at an end. Hondara was talking to his mother. They had slipped into the soft musical tongue of their country with its long vowels and absence of any guttural sound, the language of a high-born race.

"Let me show you your room," said Miss Capell.

Pauline rose to follow her.

"Don't take off your hat, Miss Laurison," cried the Moodaliyar. "We shall have time to stroll round before it gets dark. I have many things I want to show you."

Pauline was introduced to a bedroom on the same floor. There was no upper story. She thought she recognised Miss Capell's hand in its arrangements. Her luggage was in the dressing-room with her precious gun-cases and cartridge-bags and belt. An ayah entered.

"This woman will look after your things as you have no servant with you," said Miss Capell. "She understands English well."

"I won't stay to unpack now as the Moodaliyar is waiting for me. What time do you dine?"

"At seven; we keep early hours. It is best for her Excellency."

Pauline joined Hondara who was still with his mother. He was making her smile over his account of some adventure that happened to him on his trip

to Burma. He rose and the two strolled out by way of the veranda. Her Excellency's eyes followed them with a troubled look. They made a handsome pair. But as she recognised the fact, the Cingalese lady turned away with a sudden impatient movement.

"We must hurry on his marriage with the Mohandiram's daughter. He delays it and puts it off for first one reason and then another. I have been wondering why."

She stopped abruptly. Miss Capell came close to her.

"Dear Excellency! I know what is troubling you. You need not be afraid."

"But I am afraid and you know it. Anything of that kind——" she waved her hand in the direction of the retreating figures still visible as they passed through the garden.

"I assure you that you have no cause for alarm. The Moodaliyar knows England and the English. He is not likely to lose his head."

"If he did, it would be disastrous."

Meanwhile Hondara led the way through the garden with Pauline by his side. They paused now and then to look at the tuberoses and other beautiful sub-tropical flowers. His eyes were everywhere. She could see that the gardeners were not able to shirk their work. He kept five to attend to the grounds, flowerbeds, paths and shrubberies.

"I am going to take you straight to the stables," he said. "You don't mind, do you? I want to show you some of my ponies and horses."

They had some distance to walk. The stables, the trainer's bungalow, the riding school and the syces' quarters made a compact group of buildings by themselves.

As they passed along, the gardeners, stablemen and helpers at work greeted him with a ceremonious salaam. He received it with a curt but polite acknowledgment. Curious glances at the master and his companion passed as he went by.

Already his prospective marriage was spoken of and the name of the lady's father mentioned. It was a suitable match that met with universal approval. The tenants on his estate and in the large establishment that he maintained for the bungalows, were interested. Great would be the rejoicings when he married, and still greater would they be when a son and heir to his titles and property was born to him.

His mother was not the only person to look with suspicion on this tall, handsome foreign lady who, from all accounts, rode and shot like a man.

Henry Watson the trainer was ready for his employer. He gave the Moodaliyar a military salute and stood at attention.

"This is Miss Laurison. She has come to see the stables," said Hondara by way of introduction.

Watson took off his hat. He had already heard all about the visitor, and possibly was himself wondering what object the English girl had in coming to the Moodaliyar's house. His quick eye recognised the fact that she was not of the adventuress type, but was what he was pleased to call "one of the quality."

Hondara asked him to bring out certain horses, mentioning their names, and one or two polo ponies that had played in successful matches. An hour passed quickly in the exhibition of some of the best horseflesh of the stables. Pauline was no expert judge but she could recognise good points and listen with appreciation to the stories of their achievements.

It was time to return to his mother's bungalow. The sun dipped behind the hills that overlooked the valley in which they were. The situation was not unlike Kandy in formation, except that there was no lake. In place of it was an expanse of grass which the Moodaliyar had levelled and made into a miniature race-course and polo-ground. Twilight came on apace.

"I promised to show you the gardens," he said apologetically. "It is getting too dark to see them."

"Is there much besides the flower beds?"

"I have some glass houses where I grow orchids and anthuriums."

"They must wait till to-morrow morning. I have been immensely interested in all you have shown me," she said.

"To-morrow morning I hope you will ride again. You can see something of the flowers as we go back to the house."

He led her by winding paths through shrubbery, palm-grove and flower-border. A rising moon in its second quarter lighted their way.

"How lovely all this is," said Pauline, breaking a silence.

"You appreciate it!" he exclaimed. "To me it is more beautiful than any other part of the world. When my friends praise it, they find their way into my heart."

She did not reply. He added after a pause:

"My mother feels just the same about it as I do."

His mother was a safer topic of conversation than his own personality. She followed it up.

"Her Excellency, as Miss Capell calls her, is as lovely as her surroundings," she said warmly. "Tell me; has she ever been in England?"

"She was there for two years."

"Were you with her?"

"Part of the time; she had Miss Capell to look after her. They went over to Paris and Rome and stayed a month in Cairo on the way back."

"I had no idea that she had travelled so much."

"She will be pleased to tell you about her experiences. When she reached home she was like a child just back

from school; so pleased to renew her acquaintance with everything."

"Did you go to Paris?" Pauline asked.

"Paris draws me for the racing. My heart is with the gee-gees. I am afraid I don't like the mere sight-seeing that pleases the world."

"I don't care for it myself," she said.

They walked in silence to the house. He did not come in. The lamps were lighted in the drawing-room but Pauline went straight to her room.

The conversation was general during dinner. Hondara made it so by directing his remarks to first one and then another of his three companions. It was light chat and no serious topic was touched upon.

After dinner Hondara remained in the drawing-room. There were no card tables to lure him away. He was content to sit near his mother enjoying an occasional cigarette. He was not a great smoker. Tobacco, like the rest of the world's luxuries, was his servant, not his master.

Presently he rose from his chair and pulled up an occasional table.

"Come and sit here, Miss Laurison. I have something to show you," he said. "Photographs of some ponies and horses I have bred. They have brought honour and credit to my name and I am proud of them."

Pauline's memory was suddenly jogged. She recalled

the time when Prince had brought his pictures to her, with something like the same pride and enthusiasm. She watched Hondara as he fetched a portfolio from a bookstand and a little sigh escaped her.

He opened the case and took out a sheaf of pictures mounted on cardboard. To each was attached a slip of paper on which was typed the history of the horse and its triumphs. He spoke of them with pride and affection, just as Prince had talked of his hounds.

His mother sat silent and observant, except when he placed a picture in her hand and asked her if she remembered how the horse was praised in the report of its exploits on the race-course. Then she smiled at him with the maternal look that will last till the end of the world. Nothing escaped her eye.

Miss Capell went to the piano and played. Her music was like herself and had nothing new and incomprehensible about it. The sounds floated through the flower-scented air and were lost in the deep shadows of the room.

The night breeze blew in soft and warm. They were at a slightly lower elevation than Kandy, but well above the low country. The palm fronds rustled as the wind swept through them. In the recesses of their shade fireflies hung with fairy-like movements.

When the pictures were finished Pauline looked up and caught sight of the little greenish-white living lamps through the open french windows.

"Fireflies! I have never seen fireflies before!" she exclaimed, as she rose and went to the open window. She moved out into the dimly lighted veranda.

The Moodaliyar followed her quickly.

"If you go down to the path and walk a few yards from the house you will see them reflected in the lily-pool."

He took her by the elbow and guided her to the spot, removing his hand as soon as they reached it. They stood together in the moonlight gazing into the mysterious dimness where the fireflies danced.

"How lovely!" exclaimed Pauline catching her breath. "Are they to be seen on the hills?"

"Not as high up as the place where you have been staying," he replied. "They are among my earliest recollections. My ayah used to tell me that they were the spirits of the palm leaves. They were only allowed to come out at night."

The piano stopped. Miss Capell sank into the chair that the Moodaliyar had occupied near his mother. The case of photographs was lying on the little table under the lamp. She straightened the sheaf of card-boards and folded the flaps of the portfolio. Then she carried the case back to the bookshelf from which he had taken it. She returned to her chair and laid her cool fingers, that had been straying over the ivory keys, on the hand that rested in the lap of the other.

"Dearest!" she said softly. "You need not be

alarmed. I know my countrywomen. Pauline Laurison is not in love with him. Marriage is far from her thoughts. She has not the look of it in her eyes."

"I am not thinking of her. It is for my son that I fear."

"He is no longer a boy," said Miss Capell.

"No, he is a man," assented her Excellency. "It will go hard with him if—" she did not complete the sentence but her companion understood what she meant.

"I am sure that all will be well," said Miss Capell. She spoke from her convictions and not merely to reassure and comfort an anxious mother.

"She is so different from our girls. There is so much to attract and he has learnt in England itself to know and like these women of the west."

"You forget his pride of race. It is strong and will save him from marriage with anyone but a girl of his own people."

"Can anything, call it what you will, save a man from love?"

This was a question Miss Capell felt was beyond her to answer. Whatever the dreams of her youth might have been, marriage had never come to her. She was silent.

It was Pauline who made a move to return to the drawing-room.

"I've never seen a more glorious sight than those

living lamps. They are more wonderful than the phosphorescence of the sea," she said, as she joined Miss Capell and her Excellency.

Again her thoughts flew back into the past and she recalled the evening she and Prince had watched the lines of glowing green fire on the water. Suddenly she felt overcome with an unaccountable fatigue. It was not the fatigue of physical exertion. It was a mental tiredness of every thing in life. She had never experienced it before and now she could not understand it. She wanted to escape to her room. She held out her hand.

"May I be allowed to say good night, Excellency? I ought to go to bed if I am to be up early for my ride. What time do you think of starting, Moodaliyar?"

He named the time. She gave him her hand and departed, accompanied by Miss Capell. Before they were out of sight Hondara bent over his mother and kissed her. The eyes that were lifted to his held anxiety in them.

"Good night, dear mother," he said lightly. "I must be off also."

"How long is your visitor staying, my son?" she asked, searching his face closely for signs that might give away his secret, if secret there were.

"She is your visitor, mother. She will be leaving for the low country the day after to-morrow, for the waterhole shooting which I have promised. It will be

hot down there but this is the best season for it. The country is dry and though the days are warm the nights are cool. Two nights will be sufficient. I shall not suggest more. It is a strain to keep awake and watch all night."

"Are you shooting with her?"

He did not answer her question. With another "Good night" and kiss he left her.

PAULINE was ready at the appointed hour. The horses were waiting under the portico with the two syces. The Moodaliyar came up immediately. Early as it was he had already seen Watson at the stables. His energy equalled that of any European.

"We shan't want the men," he said. "We are going to ride straight out and back without dismounting."

At the entrance gate he ordered them to wait till his return.

"I am going to show you the country you are to shoot over. There's a point from which we can look down on it from a gap in the hills. It is about eight miles away. It won't be too far for you?"

She reassured him on the point.

"We must hurry on. The sun grows hot after it gets well above the forests. Come along; you will find the mare easy in her paces."

They passed through the same kind of country she had seen the day before. The road was undulating after they left the level on which the Moodaliyar's group of houses stood. The last mile ran through forest. They climbed a ridge and arrived at a gap where the

jungle ceased. A glorious view burst upon Pauline's sight.

At her feet the land fell away in steep rock and grass declivities over which the road zig-zagged, maintaining the same even, moderate gradient. Far below was a sea of primeval forest. They looked down on the mass of foliage and saw it as it appears to the soaring hawk but not with the bird's keen vision.

"To-morrow I am taking you some twenty miles farther on, into the depths of those wide stretches of jungle that you see below you."

"Are you coming with me?"

"I shall drive you to the Rest House, but I shall not stay. I am sure you will excuse me."

"Ought I not to make some preparations—" she began.

"I have made all the necessary arrangements," he replied. "I have a first-rate camp servant, a man from South India who understands English. There is a caretaker at the Rest House who calls himself the butler. Both these men are good cooks and they will see to the food and your personal comfort. In addition I am lending you old Bihoma, my head shikaree. He is a Cingalese. If anyone can put you into the way of shooting big game, he's the man. He also knows enough English to be intelligible and to understand what is said."

"Where shall I find the game?"

"At a waterhole, half a mile from the Rest House. Not far away is a village standing in the middle of a patch of fields. But you won't see much of the villagers until you kill. Then they will clamour for the meat. Bihoma will arrange that it is properly divided.'

"Do I have to get leave from Government to shoot over the land?"

"No; you have your gun licence. The waterhole, Rest House, the forest and the village are on my property."

"Is this all part of your estate?"

She pointed to the land lying under a transparent blue haze that hid nothing while it enveloped every feature of the distant landscape in an ethereal atmosphere of the purest ultramarine blue.

"Yes, it extends to the sea which, if it were not for the haze, would be visible on the horizon."

Her eyes wandered from right to left, as though fascinated with the width and breadth of it.

"It is all forest, the home of the big game I am anxious to shoot," she observed.

"It isn't given up entirely to wild beasts," he replied. "You would be surprised to see how that expanse of forest is patched with cultivated tracts. The patches have dwindled as the population has decreased. Formerly, long before the European appeared in the land, there must have been double or treble the number

of people living where that jungle now grows. I should be a very rich man if I still had those tenants."

"Where have they gone?" she asked.

"Died out from epidemics probably."

"Are the villages still standing?"

"Gone long ago; eaten up by the jungle. The ruins are hidden under that huge blanket of vegetation that we are looking down upon. You wonder how we know that they were once there."

"If you have no written history—" she began.

"The history is written in the remains of the huge tanks that exist. They are breached and rendered useless by the invasion of the jungle. But they are not altogether obliterated. You can't efface irrigation works even if you are unable to save them from the devouring jungle."

"Are the houses all gone?" she asked. The tale of the lost tenants was pathetic.

"Mud and thatch don't last long. They built their temples of stone, however. The ruins still remain buried in tropical vegetation beyond recovery."

"It is a wonderful sight, that sea of forest," she said.

The scene held her eyes. It was like nothing she had seen up in the hills.

"It is not as level as it looks," he remarked presently. "It is undulating although never steep. It lacks the precipices and the gorges of the hills."

"I suppose there are rivers."

"Any number of streams, but they dry up in the hot season. Just now there is no water left in them except for a few pools. In the rains they will be full again."

"It must be bad for your people to lose their water supply."

"They are not dependent on the streams. They draw water from tanks which I, as landlord, have to keep in repair." He would not allow her to linger.

"We must be getting home or you'll find the sun too hot."

"It is difficult to tear oneself away," she said, unwilling to leave. "I could gaze at it for hours. These wide expanses with their grand stretches of forest make one feel small and insignificant. There is nothing bleak and hostile about them. Everywhere the country is full of beauty and invitation."

His pulse quickened under her praise.

"It is pleasant to meet with appreciation," he replied.

"Don't you find your visitors stirred by the sight of it?"

"Not always."

He thought of some of his stolid British friends, who seemed to have made a vow never to praise anything.

"Perhaps they are unable to express what they feel. It is not a country to see all at once. One should live in it to value it."

She was thinking of Dolna, where she might have

made her home in the midst of so much beauty permanently. In his mind her words raised other thoughts that he tried to banish by abrupt action. He touched his horse.

"Let me give you a lead," he cried, breaking into a canter.

His dreams were resolutely suppressed. He was aware that preparations for his wedding were begun. Fate and his mother were weaving a net about his feet from the meshes of which it would be difficult to escape.

The following morning the big touring car was brought under the portico as soon as breakfast was over. A second car was lined up behind it. At the wheel of this smaller car sat Rahman, the camp servant of whom the Moodaliyar had spoken. He had loaded it with packages containing such things as would be required for her comfort at the Rest House, sheets and blankets, food, soda-water, an easy deck chair and various other things.

Pauline's personal luggage with the precious gun-cases were placed in the large car which the Moodaliyar was driving himself.

"Will you sit in front?" he said, as he threw in a cushion that he had caught up from one of the veranda lounges.

"With pleasure," she replied as she seated herself. "You are taking two cars I see."

"The smaller one I am leaving for your use at the Rest House. Rahman is a good driver. You may trust yourself to him."

He ran his eye over both cars before taking the wheel.

"Where is the old shikaree?" asked Pauline.

"I sent him down to the Rest House as soon as you accepted my invitation. He will have ordered the necessary supplies—fowls, eggs and milk—from the village. I hope you will be able to understand his English. It is primitive and best when he is on the subject of sport."

They started, waving farewell to her Excellency and Miss Capell who stood in the veranda watching their departure. As they went back to the drawing-room, the Cingalese lady turned to Miss Capell and spoke:

"Do many English women ride and shoot like Miss Laurison?"

"A certain number of those who can afford to keep horses and have estates do so, but it is the exception, not the rule," replied Miss Capell.

"I understand," she remained silent awhile. "Other English women do not attract him; they are more like our women; but this one——. He has never met a girl like this. She is not afraid of a gun and would not scream at a land leech."

"There is nothing in Miss Laurison's manner to give the impression that she is thinking of marriage," said Miss Capell. "It is said that she was to marry a

planter but she has broken it off. She is strange and unusual. All she cares for is the shooting. She will have plenty where she is going."

She did her best to reassure the uneasy mother, but although she spoke confidently of there being no danger, she admitted to herself that the situation had its difficulties.

The Moodaliyar with his princely hospitality must create some sort of impression on his visitor. It seemed as though he could not do enough for this modern up-to-date sportswoman. What did it mean and what would be the outcome? He was giving her the desire of her heart. Where would gratitude lead her?

In these days, Miss Capell remembered, mixed marriages were becoming more frequent. Would his pride of race yield to the fire of passion? It would break his mother's heart if he gave his children a foreign woman for a mother. She kept her doubts to herself. Although she loyally tried to calm her Excellency's fears, she was not without a secret misgiving. It had only come into existence as she watched the two drive away together.

The cars passed along the road in less time than it took to ride the distance. At the gap in the hills they began their long descent. They were obliged to go more slowly on the downward grade. As they left the heights behind the air grew warmer and the heat of the sun increased. It was necessary to raise the hood. A sweet

scent of tropical blossom met them, although they were still some distance from the flowering trees of the forest.

The Moodaliyar was silent. His attention was upon the highway which he was following. It required some skill in driving a large car down the winding slope.

They reached the tropical jungle of the lower elevation. It had little in common with the forest she had seen on the hills. There were no rhododendrons, no grey trailing old-man's-beard lichens fringing the hoary boughs of the forest trees.

The pace had improved now that they had passed the sharp corners of zig-zags and left the heights behind. The road though still good was dusty and the vegetation by the side was burnt brown with the fierce heat of March. A few thunderstorms would have been acceptable but they were not due yet awhile. Fine weather was what Pauline wanted for her trip. Rain would have spoilt it completely.

They passed a group of mud huts thatched with palm leaves. Near the village was a tank by means of which the surrounding fields were irrigated. In the centre of the hamlet stood the dwelling of the head man. It was a brick building with a flat terraced roof and whitewashed walls. Its dignity consisted solely in its superiority to the mud huts that surrounded it.

They left the village behind and approached what

appeared to Pauline a continuation of the vast forest. On the outskirts stood a solitary bungalow. They turned into the open gateway and drew up under a thatched portico.

"Is this the Rest House?" asked Pauline. "It looks like a private bungalow."

The Moodaliyar smiled as he answered.

"It is both. It belongs to me and cannot be used without my permission or that of the caretaker. The Rest House for the country people is in the village. This is only intended for Europeans, my friends or Government officers, who happen to be passing through the district on duty, collecting the taxes and administering the laws of the paramount power."

At the sound of the horn a Cingalese appeared. He was dressed in the same manner as the butler at her Excellency's bungalow. He wore the tortoiseshell comb in up-country fashion, although fate had decreed that the necessity of earning a living obliged him to live in the low country. He salaamed with elaborate ceremony like the rest of the Moodaliyar's dependents.

From behind the bungalow came another Cingalese who salaamed in the same ceremonious manner. He wore a close-fitting cap that covered his head and ears. The Moodaliyar caught sight of him and waved a beckoning hand.

"Bihoma! you're here. That's right."

He dropped into his own language as the old man

advanced. A long list of orders were given. They were received with close attention and an occasional glance at the lady. The gun-cases and cartridge-bags were handed over to him. He received them with reverence.

"You may trust Bihoma with all your sporting kit," said the Moodaliyar to Pauline. "He will take the greatest care of everything that is put in his charge and be proud to do it. Rahman will be responsible for the remainder of the luggage."

He called for the Rest House butler.

"Have you prepared lunch for us?"

"Everything is ready for your Excellency and for the lady."

The butler's eyes also rested on Pauline with curiosity. News flies apace in the East. One quarter of it may possibly be true; the rest is embroidery, the work of a lively imagination and the desire to produce a sensation.

Already the information had reached the Rest House establishment that this Lady of the Guns, as they called her, was to be their chief's wife. She was reported to be a princess with an estate in her own country bigger than the Moodaliyar's; and the King-Emperor himself had given her permission to use a rifle.

The Korala or head man of the village was anxiously waiting to offer his salaams and see with his own eyes the shooting lady. There were several others of less importance taking cover in all sorts of odd places near

the Rest House in the hope of obtaining a view, but not daring to show themselves lest they should incur the wrath of their Prince.

The Moodaliyar expressed himself satisfied with the preparations that had been made. He even inspected the bedroom with its cot and mosquito curtains. Rahman was instructed to show Miss Laurison where the room was and to ask if she had any orders to give. Pauline's suit-case was carried in and she was left to prepare for lunch.

The Moodaliyar returned to the veranda and sent word to the Korala that he was ready to receive him. The head man approached. In spite of the heat, he was wearing a multiplicity of garments that was astonishing. In addition he had put on all the family jewels. His head was covered with a kind of turban that was like a round, flattened cushion.

The obeisance and its acknowledgment concluded, the head man made his report, assuring his landlord that every order had been duly executed. Provisions had been sent in. The shooting hut had been erected and no one but the shikaree was allowed to approach the waterhole.

"Is game plentiful?" asked the Moodaliyar.

Very plentiful he was assured. The other waterholes were rapidly drying up as well as the streams. This particular hole, as his Excellency would remember, was supplied by water that came out of a cave in the

rocks. It was never known to run dry even in severe droughts when the village tank was almost exhausted. There were many tracks to the waterhole. They came from all directions.

"What animals have you noticed?"

"Every kind of animal that walks in the forest. Deer, wild pig, leopards, sometimes a bear, crocodiles, porcupine, jungle cats, peafowl, monkeys——"

"Any wild elephants?"

"None at present. A herd has been seen some miles away. If a beat was arranged possibly they might be driven in this direction," was the answer.

"No," replied the Moodaliyar decisively. "The lady has not asked for wild elephants. They are not to be mentioned."

Having repeated his instructions concerning the visitor, the Moodaliyar inquired after the welfare of the villagers. All were well, he was told. Was there no sickness among people or cattle?

An old man, the grandfather of the village sweeper was ill but it was only to be expected. He was a very old man and had passed the usual time when men died. His son and his grandson did the work to the satisfaction of all. They would be glad when the end came. The tomtoms were even now drumming away the useless life.

"Has everything been done for the sick man that is needful?"

The Moodaliyar was assured that even though the dying man was only of the sweeper caste, his wants had been attended to. Food and medicine had been given. His Excellency was satisfied.

LUNCH was over and Pauline rose from the table with the intention of retiring to her room for the usual afternoon rest.

"I shall see you before you leave, Moodaliyar?" she said.

"Certainly. I want to drive you out to the waterhole before I go. Will you be ready in an hour's time?"

"Yes, I shall be ready, but what about your getting back?"

"The moon is very nearly full. I propose starting for the drive home at five. I shall be there before seven."

They left the Rest House a little before three. The smaller car was used and the Moodaliyar drove himself without a servant.

"I am leaving this car for you to use. Can you drive? anyway Rahman will act as chauffeur."

They stopped at a point where the jungle closed in on the road coming on both sides to its very edge. They met no one.

"We get out here and go straight into the jungle."

"What about leaving the car?"

"It would be perfectly safe if it stood here a week. Rahman will put you and Bihoma down here. Bihoma will remain with you all night and Rahman will fetch you back to the Rest House at sunrise. Then if you are wise you will have early tea, a hot bath and go to bed for a good sleep of four or five hours. Lunch at two and you will feel as fit as a fiddle; quite ready for your second night's shoot."

They entered the forest on foot, following a narrow track that ran at right angles to the road, diving at once into the depths of the jungle. The path had been recently cleared of obstructing undergrowth. Large koombuk trees reared their masses of shining foliage overhead. Where they had space, they stretched their huge limbs towards the sun.

The jungle grew denser as they proceeded. Pauline recognised the cactus here and there but the rest of the vegetation was unfamiliar and entirely different from what she had seen up-country.

Butterflies, of strange shape and colour, soared up into the foliage of the trees with wings as strong as the small birds that were their neighbours. They sunned themselves with opening wings before creeping under leaves to hide till dawn. The first rays of the morning sun would bring them out again.

Parrots of different sizes—from the small love bird to the large green one—flew about in noisy flocks, screaming in quarrelsome play as they dashed into

the foliage where their colouring made them invisible.

In the spots of sunlight that penetrated the jungle fly-catchers, robins and various other small birds played about, pecking at an unwary insect here and there.

Pauline watched a fly-catcher performing a kind of winged dance above the pale yellow blossom of a euphorbia. The flower had a special attraction for flies and the flies drew the birds. The bird corkscrewed upwards three or four feet above the flower and came down again in irregular spirals. Its pas seul was repeated again and again.

The robin was silent. It had sung its song at sunrise and was busy taking a snatch of early supper before going to roost. The shadows of night gather in the jungle at an earlier hour than in the open, and birds and beasts seek their roosting places and their lairs before the sun has dropped below the level horizon.

The Moodaliyar pointed out the various tracks of animals. He stopped before a tree, the trunk of which was scored near the ground.

"This was done by a leopard," he said. "The leopard is like a cat and finds relief in scratching wood. The children say that it is sharpening its claws for the next mouse."

There were other signs of the presence of wild animals. They would have escaped her inexperienced

eye if her attention had not been drawn to them. Although he professed not to care for big game shooting, it was evident that he had an intimate knowledge of the animals and their habits. At some time in his earlier life, before he took to horses, he must have handled the rifle frequently.

They reached the waterhole. It was in an open space of the nature of a glade. Large trees stood clear of the jungle, casting deep shadows. The glade was bounded by dense jungle on three sides. On the fourth was a rampart of rock over a hundred feet in height. It was crowned with jungle and on its perpendicular face trailed masses of creeper known to the villagers as jungle rope.

The pool was formed by a large fissure in the rock. The titantic split reached high up into the heart of the rampart and from the cave issued the water that kept the pool supplied. The walls of the fissure glistened with moisture which never dried.

As they approached the pool a heron took wing and a hornbill fussed in the branches of a tree, both resentful of the intrusion of strangers.

A long, scaly crocodile, that had been enjoying the afternoon sun on the dried mud at the edge of the pool, waddled without haste into the water. It snapped its jaws with the sound of a couple of books being clapped together by a spring-cleaning charwoman. Slowly it sank till nothing but its nose and protruding eyes

remained on the surface, when it paddled away to the cave.

A large kingfisher flashed like a prismatic line of living colour across the water. Reassured, it presently returned to its perch on a dead branch that jutted out over the pool.

"How beautiful it all is!" said Pauline, breaking the silence. "Too beautiful for words."

He put his fingers to his lips, a signal for silence and led the way to a green hut built of freshly cut boughs. It stood a little distance from the waterhole and looked like part of the jungle that was close behind. Until her attention was drawn to it she had not observed it.

The side of the hut facing the water was about six feet in height. It had windows in it giving a clear view of the pool to the occupants of the hut. The two sides right and left were not so high. They had a single window in each, looking on the jungle. At the back, which was used as an entrance, there was no screen except such as was afforded by a few hanging boughs.

A rough seat of strong wood, capable of holding Pauline's weight, was set up just inside, in such a position that she could see the waterhole from the lower window. To shoot she would have to stand up and fire from an opening above.

"Examine it well," he said, "so that you may feel quite at home when you come to-night."

She did as he suggested, seating herself at her point

of vantage and examining the waterhole. She caught sight of some animal moving on the face of the rock to the left of the pool.

"Oh! look!" she breathed. "What is it?"

It was a wanderoo monkey making its way by the tangle of jungle rope. It dropped to the ground close to the water. Others followed by the rough ladder, letting themselves down to the earth in leisurely fashion. They carried their long tails saucily, extending them straight out on a level with their spines. Others bent their tails in a curve. The character of each individual could be read in those appendages, just as a dog's temperament may be gauged by the same means.

They had been stuffing themselves with berries in the jungle and had arrived at the waterhole for a last drink before retiring. Their roosting places were in the deep recesses of the forest trees among the branches out of reach of the leopard. Settling down for the night was a long and noisy process for the little people. It entailed many squabbles over position. Each one tried to obtain the warmest and most protected place. Nobody wanted to be outside. Much pushing and shouldering of each other ensued before peace and quiet reigned.

The monkeys reached the water each in its own fashion. Two or three ran to the pool and sucked up the water greedily. Having quenched their thirst

they dipped their faces in as if to cool overheated cheeks.

Two or three elderly wanderoos after drinking walked back over the dried mud, left by the shrinkage of the pool, to the grass. They sat down like human beings at a picnic, as if they were enjoying a day's outing. One scratched itself in true monkey fashion. Another let its long hairy arms rest on its knees, hanging its hands down from the wrists as if it had been hard at work. The Indian agriculturist, resting from his labours as he gossips at the end of the day, assumes the same position. He might have learnt it from the monkey.

The younger ones prowled round the water's edge after the manner of dogs, their thoughts on food, sniffing and smelling out all sorts of queer tit-bits.

The Moodaliyar in the hut clapped his hands. Half the troop turned sharply round and faced the direction from which the sound came. Gazing motionless with startled eyes, they growled and opened their mouths before scuttling away. The rest did not wait for possible disaster but scampered back to the rampart of rock and swarmed up the jungle ropes at full speed. Two seconds later not a monkey was visible.

"Where are they?" asked Pauline. "They have disappeared like magic."

"Hidden in the jungle on the rocks. Every one of them is watching the hut. Would you like to see them again? They won't all venture down, but some of them,

finding they are still unhurt and alive, will come back out of curiosity. Monkeys are the most inquisitive little things that exist."

He went out of the hut without any attempt at taking cover and made a great show of walking away by the path he had come. Pauline was left hidden in the hut. When he had quite disappeared and there was no sound of his footsteps some of the wanderoos returned and cautiously approached the pool.

Their confidence was shaken and Pauline could have laughed aloud at the exaggerated caution in their movements. They started and jumped when a dried twig snapped under their feet or a pebble was displaced by their movements.

The Moodaliyar showed himself again and once more the troop fled.

"This is the kind of thing that amuses me," he said, as he rejoined her. "If I were not so devoted to my training stables and stud farm, I think I should be tempted to take up photography. I wish you could see some sambur. They are such magnificent creatures, the largest of our deer. You must wait for the moonlight, however."

"I did not bring my rifle," she remarked.

"You will be sure to catch sight of them to-night. The moon is very nearly full and you will have a clear sky without fail. You should have every chance of picking out a good head. The deer are much more

timid than the monkeys. The monkeys' safety lies in their ability to climb."

"It will be very satisfactory to get a real good trophy."

Her thoughts flew to the fine head of the stag she had killed in front of the hounds. She wondered what had become of it, a detail she would never know. It was improbable that Prince would send it to her, or take it himself. He wanted nothing to remind him of the unfortunate incident. Nor did she.

"You will have to be quick with your rifle. The sambur are easily scared away. But you will have Bihoma. He is a sure guide and you may trust yourself to him."

"I suppose a leopard is what they dread most."

"It is the curse of the poor things' lives. They fear human beings as much."

"But you don't shoot them yourself."

"The villagers kill them at every opportunity. They are supposed not to meddle with the game, but I know they poach. The deer and wild pig do so much damage to their crops it is not to be wondered at. In addition they are so glad to get a bit of meat for their curry. I believe they eat everything but the horns and the hoofs and the skin."

"I am very anxious to kill a leopard," said Pauline.

"You have a good chance of doing so here."

"Will it come to drink?"

"It will be stalking the deer, more intent on the blood of a hind than on the water. It will be difficult to see. A leopard sneaks along like a cat stalking a bird or a mouse. You want sambur as well as leopard?"

"I should like to get both if I can."

"Then don't be tempted to fire at anything else. A shot disturbs the jungle and it takes some time for the game to forget it."

"What other animals will come?"

"Wild pig; they will be rooting in the mud at the edge of the water. They are not worth powder and shot; nor are the monkeys. The villagers, however, will eat anything you kill."

"Not a leopard, surely!"

"I wouldn't answer for them. A small portion of leopard's flesh is supposed to give the partaker some of the animal's qualities; its fierceness and strength."

Pauline was fascinated. She could have listened for another hour but the time was slipping away.

"I really ought to apologise for putting you through such a catechism of the jungle," she said at last.

"You are a good listener, Miss Laurison," he replied.

"When I am on a favourite subject," she rejoined.

"There was no failure in your attention when I talked stables to you and told you of the exploits of my horses. Is there anything more that you would like to know?"

"What time may I expect to see the deer?"

"Not till the small hours of the morning, just before they go to their feeding grounds. Other animals will be there before them."

"Do you think a bear will come? I should like to get a bear."

"It is very uncertain if one will be moving in this direction. However, you never know your luck, they say—in sport or in love," he added, as if to himsel rather than to his companion.

Pauline may not have heard the last few words. She made no reply.

"We must be getting back to the Rest House," he remarked. "You must give me a cup of tea before I start."

THE Moodaliyar departed with a kindly expression of regret that he could be of no more assistance. He was sufficiently a man of the western world to understand why he was not invited to see her through the shoot.

Although it was only for two nights she preferred to be alone. She carried a gun and adapted herself to a man's saddle; but he could see for himself that she was not prepared to spend two or three days alone in the jungle with any man, married or single. She was relieved of all compunction when she found that he did not expect to be included as he might have been, seeing that he had provided food, servants and shikaree. In addition it was over his land and presumably his game that she was to shoot.

As he drove back by himself he had much food for thought. He had met many English girls and was popular wherever he went but among them all not one was like Pauline.

She was passionately devoted to an outdoor pursuit not common among women. She handled it with peculiar skill and allowed it to leave no impress on her character. He could teach a girl of her temperament

how to take up racing or to play polo and do both becomingly and well. He could see her throwing herself into the life of an estate like his—if she had a vital interest in it. She would become the moving spirit of the garden, of agricultural experiment, of village housing and the improvement of his tenants' condition. Whatever she undertook to do would be carried out with energy and skill which must ensure success.

As if Fate intended to take a prominent part in the direction of his affairs, Hondara was informed on arrival home that the Mohandiram would pay him a visit on the following day. He understood the object of the visit. Should he postpone the interview? If he did so his mother would be troubled and vexed. It would be best to see his prospective father-in-law and at least listen to his proposals. This course would commit him to nothing. The thought of it, however, left him moody and uneasy.

Pauline dined at eight o'clock, by which time the moon was rising. At ten o'clock Rahman brought the car to the veranda. Bihoma was with him and helped to pack the boxes and parcels into the car.

The night air was cool and fresh and the sky was without a cloud. From the direction of the village came the monotonous beat of the death drums. They were at the house of the old sweeper where according to custom they were assisting in the passing away of his soul.

A heavy dew was falling, a sure sign that the night would continue fine. They passed along the road without meeting anyone. Rahman stopped at the same point where Hondara had pulled up. Bihoma skipped out like a young man. He took the rifles under his charge. Pauline was not allowed to touch the cases or the bags.

Rahman carried a tiffin basket, a rug and Pauline's thick coat. He also had a lantern and led the way. They proceeded in single file, Pauline between them and Bihoma bringing up the rear.

She was astonished at the noiselessness of her companion's tread. With her stout boots she found it impossible to put her foot down without the occasional crackle of a dead leaf, or the snapping of a dried twig. However slight the noise might be, it caused a wanderoo to open its eyes and give a warning grunt; and startled an owl from its point of observation as it watched for the furtive jungle rat.

No words were spoken. Bihoma and Rahman communicated by signs when they came out into a patch of moonlight. Something stirred as it hurriedly escaped from a large tussock of grass near the path.

"A snake?" inquired Pauline in a whisper.

"Small pig," replied Rahman. "I can smell."

She heard it scuttle away into the undergrowth as they passed on. Her sense of smell was not as good as her companion's. She wondered if there was any

danger from snakes where they were walking. Bihoma could have reassured her on the point. But in the rains the jungle would resound with a chorus of frogs. Then the snake might appear. At this season of the year the herbage was too dry to tempt either frog or snake to come out; or the smaller pest that had terrified Fluffie, the land leech.

They reached the hut. It had no roof but the foliage of the big tree under which it was built. It was less visible by the subdued light of the moon, broken as the beams were by the shadows thrown by the tree. It stood on the top of a little slope above the level of the water.

Rahman and Bihoma arranged the "sahman", as they called the luggage, collectively, working together silently under the shikaree's directions. When everything was placed to his liking, the other left, promising to return at dawn.

It was a strange experience for Pauline and her heart gave a throb of gratification as she realised that she was with the old man alone in the depths of the forest. This was the first time she was actually "on her own", as she termed it.

When she was with her uncle she had been personally conducted every inch of the way. It was of course all strictly in order. They were using elephants and beaters and she had not ventured to fire at the tiger till the signal was given.

She had experienced the same sensation of being under orders in her own covert shooting in Norfolk. The head keeper stationed the guns. The birds were driven over to them. It was all "according to plan", and nothing was left to the initiative of the guns. This organization spoils the pleasure for certain sportsmen. They long for what they call rough shooting where they can escape keepers and beaters and "walk up" their own game.

When Pauline was introduced by Prince to the jungle-fowl shooting there was the same control. She was not free to choose her own position, or to take any part in flushing the game. The birds were driven to the guns into the line of fire. All she had to do was to hold her rifle steady and shoot straight.

Again when the hounds were hunting she was asked to be nothing more nor less than a spectator. Everything was to be arranged like a show. She was not allowed to help in finding the stag nor in following it through the jungle.

When she took the initiative without waiting for permission to kill and brought down the escaping animal with a single shot, she found that she had committed an unpardonable sin, far-reaching in its consequences.

The Moodaliyar did not attempt to do any bear-leading. He cleared the way and gave her the means to accomplish her end. There he left her to carry on

by herself. She felt that she owed him a great debt of gratitude, greater than he was aware of. Could they not see for themselves that if she aimed only at possessing a pair of horns, she could have bought them in Kandy? Mere possession was not the point. She wanted to obtain a trophy that she could claim as her own killing.

It was with a sense of immense relief that she had the jungle to herself as was the case now. True, she had Bihoma as an assistant, but she looked upon him as a subordinate; not a director.

The waterhole had a different appearance under the light of the moon from that which it offered in the afternoon sun. The brilliant birds and butterflies were gone and the flowers had lost their colour. The jungle had a mystery about it that was absent in the broad daylight. It was silent except for whisperings and rustlings made by invisible creatures that were on the defensive, and inclined to be suspicious.

The white light from the moon was reflected from the glossy leaves of the koombuk trees, intensifying the shadows which were dark and obscure, hiding everything that sought their cover. Where the moon touched the surface of the water a sheet of silver spread beautiful in its glittering brilliancy.

On arrival at the hut Pauline put on her coat. Bihoma produced a cushion that he laid over the rough lattice work of the bench. She seated herself and he

spread the rug over her knees. As soon as he had assured himself that she was comfortable he turned his attention to the rifles.

He took them from their cases as tenderly as if they were infants, wiped them with a soft cloth and loaded them. One he laid across her knees so that she might have it ready to hand. The other he held, prepared to pass it to her at any moment. The cartridges were placed in such a position as to enable him to charge the rifles, should they require it, with as little delay as possible. The old man knew his duties and Pauline was satisfied to have him by her side. She did not speak nor move more than she could help. Bihoma was absolutely still. She wondered how he could remain so long without stirring. His vitality seemed centred in his deepset eyes. They were never still. He was squatting on his heels, gazing through a small irregular hole that he had made with his fingers in the front below the opening at which she kept watch.

Suddenly something issued from the jungle not far from the waterhole. It was followed by other moving bodies. She took them for monkeys and then remembered that Hondara had told her that the little folk slept at night in the trees and came out only in the day time. She touched the old man.

"Jackals," he breathed.

When they first appeared, her grip on the rifle had tightened. It relaxed as she watched the thirsty

creatures lapping the water like a pack of hounds. They sneaked away when they were satisfied, tailing after the one that was their chosen leader—their leader according to the law of the jungle only as long as it could hold the position by physical strength.

Then came a solitary beast with short legs, the size of a small pig. It nosed about in an unconcerned manner as if the night held no danger for it. It went to the water and quenched its thirst, never troubling to sniff the air and look round for possible enemies. It moved off towards the jungle with a curious rattling sound like a bundle of canes carried loosely. She could distinguish its white stern as it burrowed into the undergrowth.

"Porcupine," whispered Bihoma. "Missie hear quills in tail."

With such formidable armour as a protection, the porcupine might well show its indifference to the rest of the inhabitants of the forest.

Then came a splashing in the water and the occasional "clop" that she had noticed in the afternoon.

"Crocodile?" she said and Bihoma wagged his head in assent.

"Eating fish and waiting to catch little young pig. Pulling under the water and drowning before eating pig," he added.

She had heard of the misshapen reptile's disagree-

able habits of keeping its food in a larder till it was gamey. Up to that time nothing had appeared to tempt her to use her rifle. A second pack of jackals emerged from the forest. They drank and hurried off, like the others, in the direction of the village where they performed the duty of municipal scavengers. Occasionally they yelped news of their finds and the village dogs from the backyards of their masters' huts replied.

A big round ball of a creature blundered out from another part of the jungle. It crashed through the undergrowth as if the game track was not wide enough for its bulk. Its nose was to the ground, turning over and rootling in the ant-heaps thrown up near the margin of the pool. It moved like a greedy pig, intent on finding something to eat. Its erratic course was not unlike that of the porcupine; but it made more noise snuffling as it scratched and grubbed in the mud. It did not seem thirsty and was walking away from the water when Bihoma whispered:

"Bear! Missie shoot!"

A bear! and the Moodaliyar was very uncertain if she would see one! This was a bit of luck. She stood up, the muzzle of her rifle at the upper window. The bear was in shadow under one of the large trees. It was not in a good position. Grass looks dark at night. It has no reflective quality. The chequered shade thrown by the foliage of the koombuk made black

patches which her eyes, good as they were, failed to penetrate.

If the stupid animal would only cease from grubbing for ants and go to the water to drink it must come out into the broad light of the moon.

Pauline's pulse quickened as she watched its movements. Bihoma was aware of her reason for waiting. She wanted to kill and not to wound. He approved of her restraint. It was not every sportsman who could show such coolness when in sight of game. Suddenly, as if some invisible hand had given the big black ball a push, it rolled to the water's edge.

Her bullet went true, but the bear did not fall like the sambur in the hills. Its legs gave way but it recovered its feet. It tried to reach the jungle but it got no farther than the chequered grass, where it subsided into a black patch of shadow and was hidden from Pauline's eyes. Bihoma's sight was more practised. He could distinguish its form and see that it was lying motionless.

"It is dead," he said aloud.

There was no longer any need for silence, yet for all that they moved as quietly as they could. The crack of the rifle, short and sharp, had roused the jungle from its sleep. The night birds, naturally silent in their movements when they are feeding, were startled into vociferousness. Owls, hawks, night-jars rose from their perches in the trees, and circled round in the air

with wild screams and squawks. The outcry did not last long. Unless there is something to alarm the eye the forest soon returns to its habitual quiet.

The wild pigs took refuge in the thickest jungle they could find and the wanderoos awoke, barked and grunted in terror till they fell asleep once more.

Pauline and Bihoma left the hut quietly carrying the rifles with them. They were ready for any emergency. If the bear was only wounded and showed fight they were prepared with a second or third shot. But it proved to be dead.

"Good shot, Missie!" said Bihoma, as he touched it with his foot.

"The skin is in fine condition?"

"Fine; it is full grown; not too old."

He added something in his own language. His knowledge of English was not sufficient to make himself intelligible on any other subject but sport. Perhaps it was as well that Pauline could not understand what he was saying. It was to the effect that if the Powers that ruled over the births of men and women gave the Englishwoman such skill with her rifle, they would never permit of more than one gift. It was unlikely that the blessing of motherhood would be bestowed in addition. It must be one or the other, a rifle or a baby. She could not hope to enjoy both. It was too much to expect.

But their prince, their beloved Moodaliyar! It was a baby they desired for him; a son and heir.

The bear was too heavy for Bihoma to deal with alone. It must remain where it had fallen till daylight. Pauline left him to do what was necessary for the preservation of the head and the skin and returned to the hut. She was elated over her success. At last she had secured something single-handed and without assistance. The old man had taken upon himself to say "Shoot", but she had chosen her own moment to fire and could not be said to have followed his directions slavishly.

Twenty minutes later Bihoma returned. During his absence she had helped herself to food from the tiffin basket. The hot coffee from the thermos flask was very acceptable. She looked at her watch. It was between twelve and one o'clock.

"How long must we wait for the deer?" she asked.

"One hour; two hours," he replied holding up two skinny fingers—they had been duly washed in the pool after handling the bear.

"Will the deer come after the firing of the gun?"

He wagged his head in assent.

"Deer must drink before eating. They will come."

She settled herself down for a long wait. If a second bear appeared she had no intention of shooting it. One skin was sufficient. She remained very still. The forest was once more quiet except for the scratchings

and rustling in the herbage; the hum and boom of flying insects; the fall of a leaf or twig as bird and monkey moved in the trees.

The pool was never long without visitors, jackals, wild pig, muntjak, a pair of porcupines, none of which tempted her to fire again. A number of small creatures of the rat tribe came furtively to the water. A ghostly winged bird of prey swooped down with noiseless flight and carried off a shrieking furry thing that was silenced in a moment as a sharp curved beak pierced its brain.

The coffee that should have kept Pauline awake seemed to have an opposite effect. Now and then her eyelids drooped. She fought against her drowsiness. The intentness with which she had watched the water-hole in the early part of the night had weakened her eyes and made them smart. As she gazed at the moon-lit scene, the shadows became blacker in her sight and less easy to pierce. The patches of moonlight were whiter and inclined to be dazzling. She said nothing of this to Bihoma. He was once more squatting on his heels his eyes glued to his peephole below. She felt that she could safely leave the watching to him and trust him to give her due warning of the presence of the deer.

She was conscious of a touch on her knee. It was Bihoma. He dared not speak. By his signs she was aware that some animal worthy of her attention had

arrived at the pool. Once more she was on her feet, her rifle closely gripped, her finger on the trigger.

Two hinds had come out of the jungle on the opposite side to that from which the bear had emerged. They were timid and shy of approaching the pool although they knew it well. The night was full of terrors for the poor things but water they must have. They kept close together snorting and shrinking towards the sheltering jungle, afraid to go forward and unwilling to retire without their drink.

Behind them with its nose in the air scenting the wind, its magnificent antlers thrown back, stood a stag. It was in a broad beam of moonlight that illuminated its form as if a searchlight had been thrown upon it.

Something had roused its suspicions. It could not have winded them. Bihoma had taken care to have the hut built with the wind—what there was of it—in the right direction. The breeze was not likely to change and it blew from the water to the hut.

The stag was staring across the waterhole at the patches of shadow under a big tree close to the jungle.

"Fire, Missie!"

Her shot followed quickly on the old man's directions which she heard with a shade of annoyance. The hinds bounded away helter-skelter into the jungle from which they had emerged. They dashed into the rest of the herd that were holding back until the stag went to the water.

There was a crashing through the undergrowth with a snapping of branches and a rattling of the young bucks' horns as the herd jostled together in their frantic haste to escape.

The stag was not with them. It fell to its knees where it stood and rolled on the ground. Again Pauline's aim had been true and the bullet had gone home.

Then a curious thing happened for which they were not prepared. It excited old Bihoma more than a little and left Pauline with a sense of acute disappointment.

From one of the black spots of shadow, beneath a large koombuk not far from the place where the body of the bear was lying, sprang a large leopard.

It may have scented the dead animal and was intending to inspect the origin of the smell. More probably it was after the deer. Leopards are not of the nature of jackals. Dead meat has no attraction for them unless they have killed the animals themselves. The water was between the leopard and the deer. The skulking brute was waiting for the herd to come out of the jungle and spread round the pool, when it would have a better opportunity of seizing a hind.

Before it could accomplish its design the crack of the rifle startled it. It went off like a dark streak into the jungle, giving Pauline no opportunity of firing a shot.

Bihoma's annoyance was due not to the escape of the

leopard but to the fact that his attention had been entirely occupied with the stag.

"Leopard, Missie, and I never see!" he remarked with vexation.

"What was it doing there?" she asked. "Was it after the dead bear?"

"Not the bear, Missie; the deer."

"No chance of seeing it again?"

"To-morrow it may come."

"Bad luck!" said Pauline to herself as Bihoma went to the stag to prepare it for transport to the Rest House.

It would have been a triumph if she had bagged a bear, a stag and a leopard in one night. She was conscious of another annoyance. The old man had again spoken just as she was about to shoot. She must silence him somehow and let him know that she was quite capable of choosing the moment for firing.

PAULINE had little hope of seeing any more game after the second disturbance of the night. She was satisfied with her bear and stag, and content to wait for the leopard at the next night's watch by the waterhole. Bihoma was a long time preparing the stag for transport. He was an old hand at skinning and did his work thoroughly. She made herself as comfortable as she could inside the hut, wrapped the rug round her and took a much needed hour of rest.

Before dawn broke Rahman appeared with his lantern. He had with him four villagers. They had relied on a kill of some sort. The presence of the shikaree would ensure it if nothing else, and they brought ropes and a couple of stout poles on which they intended to sling the carcases.

Pauline did not wait to see the procession. She was satisfied that her precious trophies were safe in Bihoma's care.

Rahman took her swiftly back to the Rest House. The sun had barely risen when she was in bed, soothed and rested by tea and a hot bath. She awoke to a late lunch. The rest of the day passed quickly, and as soon

as late dinner was over she began to prepare for her second vigil.

It was not of much use to go to the pool until the moon was up and well above the jungle. The shorter the shadows the better. The game must be seen to ensure a clean kill. The animals might come to drink whether there was light or not. Their sense of smell assisted their sight, but Pauline must rely on sight alone. She took no risks and waited for the moon to be on the waterhole and its banks.

It was another glorious night with a clear unclouded sky, cool without cold or damp and with very little wind.

They arrived at the hut about eleven o'clock. The little shelter was very much as they had left it the night before, except that twelve hours of fierce tropical sun had affected the foliage of the boughs with which it was built. The leaves had faded and gaps had appeared in the screens. They were not of consequence. Anyone standing in the hut was sufficiently hidden from view. The only danger was lest a little vagrant current of air should carry the scent the wrong way.

Bihoma arranged the seat as before and attended to the rifles, placing one across Pauline's knees while he kept the other in readiness to hand to her should she need it.

No two days nor two nights are alike in the jungle. The trees and bushes, the deep shadows and high lights

remain in their old positions as landmarks. The variation is in the forest folk that come and go.

This evening the forest was very quiet. Nothing was to be seen or heard of mysterious movements. The moths and bats fluttered about, pursuing and pursued as usual, but the larger creatures were either absent, foraging elsewhere for food and drink, or they were in hiding, afraid to approach the waterhole.

Even the crocodile refrained from its amphibian noises and Pauline listened in vain for the rattle of the porcupine's quills, the grunting of wild pig and the snuffling of another bear.

Not a sound reached her ears but the squawk of a night heron as it flapped high overhead on its way to the swamps near the sea. She had the jungle to herself.

Yet the jungle was not asleep. It gave her a curious impression of being full of eyes. The inanimate koombuk trees, the undergrowth, the shrubs and herbage, not only seemed alive but watchful and observant. Nature was keeping vigil, not with a weapon of destruction on her knees like Pauline, but on the defensive against those who might hurt her children.

She glanced at her watch. It was just twelve. Strange, she thought, that no animal had come, no grubbing wild pigs, no easy-going porcupines, no furtive jackals. The jungle must have been disturbed, she concluded, by the previous night's operations, and the game was shy and wary.

The hut was well situated with regard to the pool, standing on slightly rising ground. It had an uninterrupted view of the margin and banks on either side and of the forest undergrowth that surrounded it.

On the right the jungle came nearer to the pool than on the left. The big trees on the left had secured elbow room for themselves. The trunks rose like great columns supporting crowns of dense foliage. These crowns cast patches of deep shade that was in strong contrast to the moonlight.

Into that same broad moonlight suddenly appeared a pack of jackals. They crept out of the jungle at different points, their noses to the ground. The margin on that side of the waterhole, which a moment before had been vacant, was occupied with ten or a dozen fidgety animals. They were in no hurry to drink. Their ears were pricked, and they whimpered now and then as they lifted an inquiring nose to sniff the air.

They, too, thought Pauline, have caught the spirit of watchfulness. They recognise the uncanny silence of the forest. They were full of suspicion. Suspicion of what? Could they see something that was hidden from her eyes? She glanced at Bihoma but he gave no sign. Nothing more was revealed to his sight than to hers. Two or three of the jackals came to the edge of the water and lapped, but while they drank they lifted their heads frequently.

Presently one of them gave a long melancholy howl.

It was followed by a chorus of yaps. The others gathered round the leader. For some time they remained gazing across the water at the opposite bank where the trees stood. The jacks lifted their pointed noses with a low whining but they did not venture to circle round the pool. They were content to keep their eyes on the black patches of shade and howl their defiance at the invisible object that had excited their curiosity. Something that they scented perhaps but could not see.

Pauline's pulse quickened as her mind instantly jumped to the leopard of the night before. If it was not the same brute, it might very well be another with the same object in view, a tender young hind from the herd. She felt convinced that a leopard was crouching there although she could distinguish nothing. The rough grass was long enough to hide any skulking beast of the feline tribe.

The jackals must have winded it. They quietly slipped back into the jungle by the way they had come and took the shortest trail to the village where was safety and food. When they had disappeared Pauline asked:

"What was the matter with them, Bihoma?"

"Frightened; too much frightened to drink."

"Yes, I could see that for myself. What do you think it was that scared them away?"

"Can't tell yet, Missie."

"Was it a leopard?"

"May be," answered the old man.

"Did the jackals smell the blood of the sambur and bear that I killed last night?" she asked.

"The sun dried up all the blood."

"Perhaps they winded another leopard. I am sure they smelt something from the way they kept sniffing the air."

"Can't say," replied the cautious old man.

"Do leopards eat jackals?"

"If they can catch; but jackals got plenty too much sense to get catched."

"What other food do leopards like?" she asked, glad to relieve the monotony of the vigil by a little conversation. She wished that she could speak the old shikaree's language. What tales of the jungle he could tell!

"Deer, wild pig, dogs, jungle sheep. They like best to drink the warm blood. They know how to break the vein open where the blood runs quickest." (The jugular vein.)

They dropped into the silence again that was so necessary if they wished to see more game. An hour passed but not another creature came. Pauline concluded that it took more than twenty-four hours to restore the peace of the forest and the confidence of its inhabitants. The jackals did not return. She was not anxious to see them. If deer were likely to appear

the leopard would wait for them and give her the opportunity she so much wished for.

She fixed her attention on the shadows under the trees. It was here that she made sure that the leopard would wait. The grass was long and coarse and had dried since the monsoon floods. It was growing in tussocks and from the tall upright stems that bore feathery heads of blossom, the long strands fell away in a fringe of narrow blades sufficiently tough and thick to hide any animal that could crouch.

Now and then she fancied she could detect a movement in the grass other than that caused by the occasional breath of the night wind. Bihoma was not at his ease. His eyes were fastened to his special peephole which had grown larger than it was on the previous night. His attention was also fixed on the black shadows under the trees which Pauline was watching.

Abruptly he abandoned his watch and detached himself from his point of observation, as though out of patience with his work. He drew the tiffin basket towards Pauline.

"Lady have some coffee?"

She was quite ready for her late supper. He opened the basket and handed her a plate and a packet of sandwiches. The food was acceptable.

Pauline was conscious of a sense of disappointment as she relaxed her vigil and applied herself to the

excellent fare provided by the Rest House butler. So far she had drawn a blank. The night, however, was only half gone. In another hour or so the deer should be there and she should bag the much desired leopard that was waiting for them.

She did not intend to fire again at sambur nor at a bear if another presented itself. She was satisfied with the spoil of the previous evening. The leopard was her objective and the leopard she meant to have, if only her luck was in and she was given a fair opportunity.

This evening she was not troubled with drowsiness. She felt peculiarly alert and wide-awake. Her long sleep during the day had restored her nerves and she felt ready for a great adventure. It was her last big game shoot. In a few days she must be in Colombo to embark. Her eyes were becoming familiar with the various objects round her and the effort of watching was less of a strain.

Bihoma repacked the basket, gave another look to the rifles and rearranged the rug over Pauline's knees. The air was growing a trifle cooler in the small hours of the night. The old man took a long draught from the waterpot that he kept outside the hut. He prepared a neat little roll of pan-supari to chew and stuffed it into his cheek. It was all the supper he needed.

Again Pauline consulted her watch. It was nearly two o'clock. At any time now the deer might be seeking the water and the leopard would be stalking the deer.

Something moved in the shadow of the tree nearest to the jungle. It was not the waving of the grass in the wind. She was positive that she was not mistaken. It was a creature that crouched and watched, as motionless as herself. It could not be anything else but the leopard for which she was waiting. If only it would come out into the moonlight and show itself, she might get a shot.

She fancied that she recognised some object dark and solid against the tussocks of grass. Possibly it was the back of the animal or it might be the head raised for a second to get a view of the opposite bank. But it did not seem inclined to leave the cover of the shade. Although it stirred stealthily it made no change in its position.

Pauline wondered if Bihoma had noticed it. Very little, if anything, escaped his eye. He was squatting on his heels at his peephole, his face pressed forward as he continued to gaze intently at the same spot that had held her attention. Had he been a white man he might have been seen but his dark complexion made him more or less indistinct.

She rose quickly, grasping her rifle and pointing it out of the upper window. She had learnt to be noiseless in her movements and careful to make no sound underfoot. Bihoma noted her change of position and preparation to shoot. He lifted his hand while he continued to watch. It was a signal to wait.

She remembered how the old man had taken on himself to give directions as to the moment of firing the evening before. She determined not to wait to-night but to anticipate any orders by firing before he could speak.

A small sound fell on her ears. It was the snapping of a dry twig and it came from the direction of the tree. Again she felt certain that her eyes did not deceive her. An object moved in the centre of that dark shade. It was a rounded form, the head of an animal that was looking for something not visible from its hiding place.

Without a word she lifted the rifle to her shoulder, took steady aim and fired.

Bihoma, squatting at her feet and intently gazing at the shadow, had not noticed the action. His left hand was still raised; it might be to enjoin silence, she thought; it might be a sign not to fire until he was assured himself that a good shot could be secured.

He was startled by the crack above his head. He sprang to his feet with an exclamation in his own tongue that she did not understand.

A PIERCING shriek succeeded the discharge of the rifle. It was followed by a bloodcurdling groan which electrified Pauline and paralysed her with a deadly apprehension.

The outcry was not that of an animal. It was human, terribly and convincingly human.

Pauline sank down upon her seat. Her heart seemed to stop beating altogether.

"What—what—have—I—shot?" she gasped.

Bihoma took the smoking rifle from her and placed it in a corner of the hut; she was incapable of holding it any longer in her nerveless hands.

"What is it?" she demanded again.

He stepped out of the hut, carrying the spare rifle with the intention of using it himself should it be necessary. Pauline, pulling herself together, followed him.

"Is it a leopard or—or a monkey?"

"Can't say, Missie. Must go and see," was the cautious reply.

She was pressing forward in her agitation but he held her back.

"I go first and perhaps I shoot," he said as he took the lead.

She was only too glad to allow him to do so and to follow his directions. Warily they approached the tree, prepared to defend themselves if occasion arose. It was as well to be cautious, but Bihoma had a shrewd suspicion, which he kept to himself, that they were in no danger. He had recognised the nature of the cry and was prepared for what was coming.

As they drew near the tree they distinguished an object lying motionless in the patch of shadow. At that moment two men issued from the jungle and ran forward. They took no notice of Pauline and her companion.

With heartrending wails and lamentations they flung themselves down on the grass making gestures of extravagant grief. Together they lifted a human body into the broad light of the moon and laid it out face uppermost.

Pauline's horror-stricken eyes beheld the figure of an old man. He was apparently dead. Her aim had been fatally true and her bullet had gone through the head, shattering the jaw.

The two mourners placed their hands together palm to palm and lifted them above their heads. They rocked their bodies; they wept and wailed and gabbled in their own tongue. Occasionally they addressed Pauline.

"What do they say?" she asked.

The sight of their grief distressed her beyond measure. She could not bear it and she drew away a little distance from them. Strong as she was, with no lack of self-possession, she could not bear to look at that lifeless body lying in the chequered moonlight. It made her feel sick and faint. Fortunately no blood flowed to add to the horror of the scene. As the shikaree did not reply she repeated her question, adding another.

"Tell me, what are they saying? They accuse me of killing the man, I suppose."

Bihoma made a sign of assent and kept silence.

"What was he doing there in my line of fire?" she demanded. "I must have an explanation. Tell me, shikaree, what does it all mean?"

"They say that he was very sick. He asked to be brought to the pool to bathe and drink. Water making sick man quite well. They put him where he give order. Then leaving and waiting in the jungle till he call."

Bihoma found it difficult to relate his tale. His knowledge of English did not carry him far.

"Did anyone ever hear of such folly? How were we to know he was there?" cried Pauline, as she turned to go back to the hut. She could do no good standing there with that dreadful corpse before her eyes.

One of the men followed her. He fell at her feet and

touched the ground with his forehead. He clasped his hands over her instep as though to detain her till she had heard his petition. He spoke volubly. Again she had to appeal to Bihoma to translate.

"Tell me what he wants."

He obeyed her with a curious reluctance and an absence of all pity and sympathy which she considered cold and unnatural. But perhaps this was the custom with these people.

"He asks Missie to give ten rupees to pay for burying."

"Is that all? Does he understand that I have——" the words choked her—"that I have murdered the old man, I have caused his death?"

"He understands."

The younger one had come up and taken his place by the side of the elder. Again they gabbled at her, first one and then the other.

"What do they say?" she asked with a touch of nervous impatience.

"He says plenty sorry to give trouble and asking pardon. Very old man this. Would soon die. But must give proper burial."

"The affair can't be closed down in that way," protested Pauline. "The police must be told."

Pauline's nerves were becoming more and more rattled. Here were the relatives ready to condone the offence with a money payment and hush up the

affair. Their faces fell at the mention of the police. But whatever might be their view of the accident, there must be a coroner's inquest and she could not hope to escape the charge of manslaughter. Bihoma was speaking:

"No police got in the village. What can police do?" he added contemptuously as he regarded the men with no friendly eye. That his Missie, who was put in his charge by the Moodaliyar, should be troubled in this way roused his anger.

"Something must be done, but I don't know how to set about it," she said, looking at the old shikaree in perplexity. She spoke more to herself than to him.

"His Excellency, the Moodaliyar, will give order." He turned to the men who were still on their knees before Pauline, to her great discomfort, and told them to get up. They scrambled to their feet and held out the receptive hand.

The Moodaliyar!

Pauline thought of him with relief. She must get into communication with him as soon as possible.

"Tell these men that I will do whatever the Moodaliyar orders."

They stopped their pleading and lamentation and looked at each other. The name of their landlord evidently carried weight. Bihoma as an interpreter was again appealed to.

"They say no need to send for police. Police do no good. Only making charge. No need to trouble his Excellency about such a small matter as an old sweeper man. If Missie will give ten rupees for burial feast everybody will be pleased. They will call down blessings on Missie's head with long life. Ten rupees proper price for killing sweeper."

Almost she could have laughed. They were turning the tragedy into a farce. Pauline glanced again at Bihoma. Something in his tone told her that he was not espousing the cause with any warmth. She was puzzled. Her money was locked up in her bag at the Rest House. She did not carry rupees when she went into the jungle. If she had done so and had the cash on her, she would probably have given them the sum they asked.

What an infinity of trouble she would have saved herself if she had not been so foolish as to disregard the shikaree's signals.

"Shall I promise them the money?" she asked. "I have none with me."

"Must wait till his Excellency comes."

"Tell them so. Also make them understand that the accident can't be hushed up by the payment of ten rupees."

"These village people fool-people! No good talking!"

He spoke to them angrily and ordered them to take

the body to their hut in the village. He concluded with words which sounded as if they held a threat.

"They must have been 'fool-people' to bring the old man here," she said as she walked back to their hut. "Where were the two men when I fired at the old one?"

"Hiding in the jungle."

"I wonder I didn't kill all three. If I had seen them moving about in the jungle I should have fired, thinking that they were leopards. I cannot understand why they did not come to the hut and warn us."

"Too plenty stupid," was the reply.

"No wonder the game kept away from the water-hole."

"And the jackals smelling and running away," added Bihoma.

In the tiffin basket was a small flask of whisky. She seldom touched alcohol of any kind except as a medicine. She felt the need of it now. Her knees were weak and she trembled in every limb. The hand with which she poured out the whisky shook to such an extent that some of it was spilt. Bihoma steadied the cup and watched her anxiously as she drank.

She picked up her rifle and handed it to him. She was seized with a sudden distaste for the weapon. It had done infinite harm once before. It had killed love. Now it had killed an innocent human being.

The two men were slow in lifting and removing the

corpse. They were not at all satisfied at being dismissed without even a promise of compensation. The elder, between forty and fifty and son of the dead sweeper, was spokesman. The younger, a grandson, had been the one to lament and wail, a part he seemed to like to play. He was quite ready to recommence his mourning but his father silenced him.

They approached the hut where Pauline sat and again pleaded for money. Gradually they lowered their demand and begged for less. For eight rupees, seven if the lady would not give more; and they would depart and she should hear no more of the unfortunate accident. They mentioned that it was reported in the village that she was very rich. What were seven rupees to a lady who possessed scores of rupees. However if she could not give them seven, they would take six or even five.

At this Bihoma drove them both away, threatening that the lady would shoot them both if they did not take themselves off. The shikaree lifted one of the rifles as he spoke. He added that if there were three dead bodies left at the waterhole, the wild pigs and the jackals would soon come and clear up all trace of the tragedy.

Whether they believed his preposterous statement or not, it concluded the argument. They returned to the corpse and prepared it for the journey back.

"The deer will not come to-night," observed Bihoma.

"Too much bobbery those men making. Shall I fetch the car for Missie?"

"No!" she cried in a sudden panic. "Don't leave me. I will walk with you to the Rest House."

"Long walk for Missie, two miles."

"I don't mind. Let me get out of the jungle. The walk will do me good."

She was beginning to feel a loathing for the spot that had been so full of fascination when she first made its acquaintance. If a leopard had emerged from the jungle and stared her in the face, she would have turned away and let it go sooner than lift the rifle to her shoulder.

Bihoma replaced the guns in their cases and arranged them on the floor of the hut with the tiffin basket. He broke off some fresh branches and filled in the opening of the little building.

She watched him like a woman in a dream, a strange woman unknown to herself. She had been suddenly shocked into a trembling creature who shrank from the sight of a gun. A sense of disaster overwhelmed her. The old self-sufficiency was gone and she found herself curiously dependent on the Cingalese, waiting for his directions and no longer resentful if he took the lead. Their respective positions were reversed.

They walked in single file through the jungle, Bihoma going in front by her request. At starting he had placed in her hand a stout bamboo to serve as a walking

stick. He would have held her by the arm but the path was too narrow to allow of it.

Small wild things in the herbage were disturbed by their passing. The creatures, keeping out of sight, rustled away into deeper cover. Once the rattle of quills betrayed the presence of a porcupine. Overhead the scream of a night bird fell on their ears. A large pale moth fluttered wildly from a pursuing bat, almost touching their faces.

Nothing escaped the shikaree's eyes and ears. He had the wild animal's sense of hearing and probably to some extent its sense of smell. His companion saw and heard nothing. Her senses were deadened for the time. It was as well for her that she had to walk. The night air was fresh and cool. It helped to restore her nerves and benumbed brain.

Bihoma took her at an easy pace and when they reached the road she was glad to place her hand on his arm. He could feel her fingers quiver. More than once he glanced at her, wondering if her strength would carry her through the walk to the Rest House.

They met no one and saw no sign of the two villagers with their ghastly burden. Jackals howled in the direction of the village and the pariah dogs bayed at the moon.

It was three o'clock in the morning when they reached the Rest House. Rahman and the bungalow

butler, rolled in blankets, were both asleep on their mats. They were quickly roused.

Bihoma in his own tongue gave them an account of what had happened. The gun-cases and other property were to be sent for as soon as it was light. But Pauline was quite indifferent to her precious rifles and cartridge-bags. She never wanted to see them again.

The Rest House butler brought her a cup of beef tea with a slice of toast. While she took it, he and Rahman talked to Bihoma in low voices. At times they sounded indignant at the conduct of men who belonged to the lowest caste in the village. They did not express any opinion to Pauline. She could gather however that their sympathy was with her and not with the dying man, whose end had been hurried on by a stupid action of reprehensible folly.

Rahman came into the veranda where she had flung herself wearily into a chair. He took up the tray.

"Shall I get the car ready, Lady?" he asked.

"Yes! yes!" she replied, rousing herself from her numb lethargy. "Can we start at once?"

"As soon as your honour pleases. The shikaree says we must tell his honour, the Moodaliyar, what has happened, at once, before the old grandfather is buried."

"Will there be light enough to drive?"

"We have lamps and there is the moon."

"Then let us go. I shall be very glad to get back to his Excellency's house."

She went to the bedroom and put her personal property together. At the sound of the horn in the portico she came out. Bihoma took her suit-case to the car. It seemed as though they could not do enough to show their sympathy and regret at the unhappy ending of her shooting excursion.

"To-morrow I send the guns and cartridge-bags back by his Excellency's car," said Bihoma, as he made a deep salaam.

He promised to give the Moodaliyar a full account of the accident. He also undertook to prepare the skins and heads of the bear and sambur for transport to England. He had done the same for many English gentlemen, he assured Pauline. She did not respond but he judged from the liberal tips she left behind that she was satisfied with the services he and the rest of the staff had given.

It was half-past three when she took her seat in the car. From the village came the sound of the death drums, reminding her of the burial feast that was in preparation. She wondered if Bihoma was right in saying that no money should be given until the consent of the Moodaliyar had been obtained. She referred to Rahman and the butler. They both supported Bihoma and begged her to do nothing at present. Not only must the Moodaliyar be consulted but the head man

of the village would have something to say on the subject.

Rahman drove carefully. It was only when they began to ascend and climb the zig-zags that it was necessary to go slowly. A precipice on one side and a wall of rock on the other allowed of no hurrying. But Pauline was suffering too severely from shock to observe anything by the wayside. The road was free of all traffic. They met one string of carts. The driver of the first cart was awake. The rest of the cartmen were dozing, leaving their patient beasts to follow their leaders.

At the sound of the motor's horn the leading cartman called a halt and drew to the side of the road. The rest of the bulls, working in pairs, kept in line with marvellous precision. They required very little guidance. There was only just room for the car to pass.

With a blank gaze Pauline continued to stare in front of her, scarcely seeing the white cattle in the moonlight. Nor did she hear the groaning of the brakes on the great wooden wheels and the shouts of the drivers as the long, narrow, unwieldy carts with their little swinging lanterns underneath started again.

Rahman glanced at her once or twice as she sat by his side. He had received many injunctions from Bihoma to take every care of her. She was so still and silent, he would have concluded that she was asleep if he had not seen her eyes wide open and staring.

The full moon paled before the dawn as the sky in the east took on its primrose and golden tints. They turned into the grounds and drew up under the portico of her Excellency's house at sunrise.

THE establishment was astir. In the back veranda the kettle was on the charcoal fire in preparation for early tea. The butler with hastily assumed jacket and sarong hurried forward. Rahman gave a hasty explanation while the suit-case and rug were taken out. Then he drove off at once to his master's bungalow.

Miss Capell appeared in a dressing gown, surprised and disturbed.

"Miss Laurison! You are back early. We were not expecting you till lunch."

"I have had an accident," Pauline replied dully.

"You are not hurt, I hope!" said Miss Capell, searching her face for signs of bodily injury.

"I have not been hurt but I am afraid someone else has been injured." She spoke with difficulty. Her voice seemed to have left her. "I ought to say killed, for the man is dead."

"Who is it? Not the old shikaree I hope? He's such a favourite with the Moodaliyar."

"No, I left Bihoma safe and sound waiting at the Rest House for his Excellency. It was one of the villagers who got into my line of fire. And I accidentally —shot—him."

Her brain was still numbed and she brought out her words painfully. She sank into one of the lounges in the veranda as if her legs refused to carry her farther.

"You were alone?"

"I had Bihoma with me. If only I had followed his directions it would not have happened. His sight is better than mine. I took the villager for a leopard and fired without waiting for Bihoma to give the word, idiot that I was!"

She threw her head back on the cushion of the chair and closed her eyes. Miss Capell saw that she was not fit to talk of the accident. She asked no more questions but went to her room, returning with a bottle of eau-de-Cologne and a handkerchief. She bathed Pauline's forehead and hands.

"Wouldn't you like to go to your room? You have been up all night and have had no sleep."

"I must see the Moodaliyar first."

"He will be here directly. Just rest till he comes."

In five minutes' time they heard his step on the gravel path. He sprang up into the veranda and hurried towards her. Pauline sat up but did not venture to rise from her chair, afraid lest she should betray her weakness.

"Miss Laurison!" he exclaimed as his eyes fell on her white, drawn face. "I am afraid from what Rahman tells me you have had rather a shock."

"It is a nasty shock," she replied, with an effort to

speak lightly which did not deceive him. "Did Rahman tell you of the accident?"

"He said that the villagers accused you of shooting one of their number, an old man of the sweeper caste. Rahman doesn't hold him in much estimation but that would be his attitude towards a man of that caste."

"Whatever caste he is, he's a human being."

"He also said that they demanded compensation."

"I am quite ready to give it but compensation, as they call it, does not lift the hideous burden that has fallen on me. The fact remains. I have unfortunately caused the death of a man."

"Through no fault of your own!" he rejoined with some vehemence. "The blame rests with the sweeper himself. What was he doing—what were they all doing at the waterhole when it was known to the whole village that you were lying up in a hut made on purpose to kill game?"

"The men said that they brought the old man to the pool at his urgent request so that he might drink at the waterhole. He was under the impression that it would restore his health. I was watching for a leopard. I saw something move in the long grass——"

"Are you sure that something moved? It might have been a gust of wind stirring the long grass."

"I am positive that I could distinguish some movement which was not due to the wind," said Pauline.

The incidents were imprinted on her brain for ever. "I took it for a leopard waiting for the deer."

"Did Bihoma think it was likely that one would be on the watch for deer?"

"We saw one the evening before at exactly the same place. I had just killed the stag and the sound of my rifle made it spring out of the long grass. I had no chance of a shot. We neither of us suspected its presence and it was gone in a moment. This time I was closely watching the same spot thinking it might be there again."

"Did it change its position and move from one place to another?"

"I didn't wait for it to move. I was too anxious to secure it. It seemed to lift its head as a cat does, to take a look round. Then I fired and the poor man gave an awful scream and groan. I hope I shall never hear anything like it again." She shuddered.

"The scream puzzles me," said the Moodaliyar, the brows over his fine eyes drawn together in his perplexity. "It is all rather mysterious. However, when I am there I shall be able, I hope, to find out what has really happened. Bihoma, I understand from Rahman, has remained on the spot. He will probably be able to explain the matter."

"I think he was puzzled himself."

"You found him useful in the jungle?"

"Most helpful in every way," replied Pauline warmly.

"If only I had left things more to him, this would not have happened."

"What do you mean?"

"On the first night I killed a bear and a sambur. Each time, before I could pull the trigger, Bihoma said: 'Now shoot.' His directions to shoot annoyed me. I thought that he might have left me to decide when to fire."

"He considered it his duty as shikaree to do it." He paused and then added: "I don't know what the old man was about to miss seeing the leopard."

Hondara was troubled at what he considered to be a failure on the part of his trusted shikaree. She wondered if he was blaming him. This would be unfair to Bihoma.

"The animal was so completely under cover that it escaped his notice as well as mine. We were both concentrating our attention on the sambur. On this second night I was keen to fire before Bihoma could speak. That was my mistake."

"I suppose his eyes were on the same spot as yours. He saw what you saw."

"Yes; he must have done so. He was closely watching that same patch of shade from which we had seen the leopard spring the previous night."

"And he said nothing?"

"Of course we spoke as little as possible. He made signs which I understood. Every moment I expected

him to whisper: 'shoot!' He had already lifted his hand as if about to speak."

"Did you recognise it as a signal for you to wait?"

"The fact was I wished this time to shoot entirely on my own. When I saw what looked exactly like the raised head of an animal, I took careful aim and fired, without giving Bihoma time to speak."

"You are sure you hit the man?"

She glanced at him in surprise. What could he mean?

"I could have no doubt about it. I had the evidence of my eyes and ears. The bullet went through his head, shattering the jaw. The dreadful scream I shall never forget as long as I live. It was followed by a heart-rending groan."

"Curious!" remarked the Moodaliyar.

"Why? What is odd about it?"

"When men or animals are hit in the head they die instantly without a sound. Did you see the mark of the bullet?"

"Yes. I followed close on the heels of Bihoma. As we approached the body two men came out of the jungle, the old man's son and grandson. They began to wail and lament in the most pitiful manner. Presently they demanded ten rupees as compensation."

"Did you give it?" he asked quickly.

"No; I would have done so but Bihoma stopped me.

He was very decided. He insisted that nothing could be done without the Moodaliyar's consent."

"He was quite right. If compensation is just they shall have it. But before any payment is made I must inquire into the matter. They had no business to be there at that hour. If they considered that a visit to the waterhole was necessary, to satisfy the fancy of a dying man, why did they choose the dead of night for it?"

Plainly the Moodaliyar was more than a little puzzled. Again he questioned her about the movements she had seen in the grass.

"Did the sick man change his position and try to approach the water?"

"He may have been attempting something of the sort," she replied.

"From his age and decrepitude I should have thought that he was too weak to make any movement of that kind," remarked Hondara.

"Anyway he must have been just strong enough to lift his head," suggested Pauline, who did not intend to go back on her statement that she had distinctly seen something move.

Miss Capell, who had seized the opportunity to retire to her room and make her toilet, returned. As her anxious eyes fell on Pauline's wan face she said:

"Don't you think, Moodaliyar, that Miss Laurison had better go to bed?"

"Most certainly!" he cried, springing to his feet with sudden compunction. "I have kept you too long, but I wanted all the particulars you could give me. I must be off to the village at once. I must see the dead body before they bury it."

"You will find the mark of my bullet," she said.

He looked down at her dejected figure. Pity filled his heart. She had carried herself so bravely up to the present. She had been so delighted with her big game shooting.

Her natural courage and assurance had completely broken down under this crushing misfortune. He regretted that it had happened while she was his guest. And yet he was thankful that he was able to help her in her trouble. He was turning to leave when she asked:

"What time will you be back?"

"You may see me about six o'clock this evening, if everything goes smoothly," he replied.

"Come as soon as you can and let me know the worst," she replied.

She tried hard to smile. She did not tell him that she felt as though the only friend she possessed in the world was leaving her. Her natural pride sustained her. Even now, when she was suffering acutely from the shock to her nerves, she did not give way. No tears, no hysterical outburst distressed those who were standing round her, full of warm sympathy.

She had told her tale calmly and clearly. The

Moodaliyar could only suppose that it was an accident, attributable to the crass stupidity of the country people. The details given by herself and by Rahman left him with little hope that he could prove death by any other means than her rifle.

Yet he remained perplexed and worried. He had never heard that the waterhole was supposed to have medicinal virtues. No temple stood near it nor was it on the track of any pilgrim's way.

He must see Bihoma and the head man of the village. A doctor must be called in and possibly the coroner if the medical man was unable to give a death certificate.

"You must get a few hours sleep if you can manage it," he said, still lingering by her side, he could not have said why.

"I will try; but it will not be easy. I have taken a human life. The thought of it will haunt me to the end of my days. My obstinacy has made me a murderer."

"In no case can that be said. It cannot be called anything but an accident and no blame can possibly be attached to you," he said with a decision that went far to reassure her.

She sat up in her chair.

"Moodaliyar!" she cried. "Don't deceive me! Tell me the truth when you return. If I have killed the man I have killed him, and I must accept the fact as best I can. I must live it down."

She held out her hand. He took it and with a close pressure of her fingers he said:

"You shall have the truth, I promise."

"Then I will try to be patient till you return."

PAULINE went to bed but sleep was far from her eyelids. The scene was enacted over and over again in visions too vivid to be driven away. Her ears still rang with the piercing scream of the stricken man and the dying groan that followed.

In her mind's eye she could see the ghastly corpse with the dark ochre shades of the skin that the brown body assumes in death. The memory of the scene made her shudder and shudder again.

She thought of her big game shooting with ever increasing disgust. It began well enough with the personally conducted tiger hunt. Through her uncle's illness the expedition to the Central Provinces had brought her nothing else. She had turned to Ceylon full of confident hope that she would be able there to add to her trophies but she had been bitterly disappointed.

Through an act, wilful, rash and unsportsmanlike, she had lost her lover. Enthusiast as she was with her rifle, she had discovered that life held a stronger passion than sport, a passion that the killing of birds and beasts could never satisfy. When she first started out

fully equipped to kill the tiger and the leopard, it had appeared the highest aim and ambition that life could offer.

Then came love—a new experience—gentle and subservient at first but growing out of bounds as time flew by till it dominated all other emotions.

The sporting instinct did not submit tamely to being ousted and it protested; it showed its enmity by means of a disastrous act that caused unexpected misery. Thus she learnt one of the great lessons of life that love will consent to be second to none.

After the rupture she knew what she had lost; what it was that had suddenly darkened her life and left her with nothing to live for. For she had given her love unreservedly to Lionel Prince and she had received in return a full measure of the love of a fine, strong man, a gift that did not fall to the lot of every woman.

In her trouble her thoughts turned to him. She longed intensely for the sympathy that she felt sure would be hers if she asked for it. Perhaps if she had admitted that she had wronged him grievously by shooting the stag in front of his hounds, he would have forgiven her. He was generous and large hearted. Vindictiveness found no place in his nature; but it was not likely that a man of his temperament would be satisfied with the conventional apology offered: "Sorry; my mistake."

Then there was his expression of anger and the words he had used and implied.

She had led a sheltered life with her parents, an only daughter and no brothers. She had never been sworn at in her life, even if she had deserved it. The utmost she had received in the way of reproof from her old-fashioned parents was:

"My dear! you should not do so!"

No man is justified in using strong language to a woman. But men have their limitations when temper is roused. Prince was only human. He bit his tongue to keep back the actual words but they might just as well have been spoken, so plainly were they implied. And the worst of it was that by this time she was honest enough to admit to herself that she deserved all he said and possibly more.

Just as she had now put an end to the life of a poor harmless human being, through a greedy desire to obtain something at her own time and in her own way, she had shot Prince's stag.

Regret for her wilful hastiness in both cases was deepening, apart from remorse for the fatal consequences that had ensued in both cases.

Behind it all was the as yet unconscious craving to make amends. If Prince had sent her a single word or message that would have given her an opening for pleading for forgiveness, she would have seized it. She was not without the good qualities of a warm,

generous nature that can ask for pardon as well as grant it.

Prince, as we know, had remained absolutely silent. It was not a silence that resulted from separation and want of opportunity to explain. He might have sent a message through Mrs. Macdonald. He could have written a few lines by post. Now and then a ray of hope crossed her sorely tried heart that she would hear from him before she left the Island. But the olive branch did not come. The paralysing silence remained unbroken.

If she had only known it, there was a reason for this silence. What he had learnt from Mrs. Macdonald—that she was staying as a guest with the Moodaliyar—effectually stopped any action that might bring about a reconciliation.

Now and then the question presented itself. Should she be the one to take the first step?

Against this her pride rebelled. It would be nothing more nor less than asking a man to marry her. This she would not do either directly or indirectly.

No; she must abide by what she had done. She must take the consequences with spirit and show Lionel Prince that she had her pride and could hold her head high. She must live it down. She was already beginning to feel that a shadow was darkening her whole life. The moment had come when she longed for a stronger character to turn to for comfort and advice. Prince

was the only man who could give her what she wanted and he was irrevocably alienated.

Pauline went through the recent events in her life again and again, tossing restless and wakeful under the electric fan. When the gong sounded for lunch she joined her hostess but she could not eat. There was little conversation. The waterhole was not mentioned. Pauline could feel their sympathy and pity although it was unspoken.

The day passed slowly for her, for she could neither read nor sleep. After tea Miss Capell said:

"Would you mind if we left you for a couple of hours? Her Excellency usually takes a drive every afternoon."

"Not in the least," replied Pauline, glad to feel that she was not upsetting their routine.

At half-past four their car appeared and they were driven away and she had the house to herself. She wandered in the garden, down the well-kept paths and along borders of luxuriant sub-tropical flowers. She came upon unexpected nooks and corners that at any other time would have delighted her. Her eye passed over the cultivated beauties of blossom, fern and variegated leaf without conveying to the brain the rare sight of tropical loveliness.

She returned to the veranda to wait for the coming of the Moodaliyar. He had named six o'clock as the hour when she might see him.

The sun was not far from its setting when the distant sound of the motor horn warned her of his advent. The car pulled up under the portico. Hondara got out and hurried up the steps. The butler and another servant appeared. At a word from the master they took the luggage from the car and brought it into the veranda. Foremost were the gun-cases. They were placed in a conspicuous position. She turned from them with loathing.

"Oh!" she cried. "Take them away! I never want to see them again. My shooting is over for ever."

He made no reply but searched her face closely.

"You look better," he said, and there was relief in his tone. He on the other hand was fagged and tired.

He took her arm and led her to the end of the veranda into which the drawing-room opened. They sat down.

"We shall not be disturbed here. I have much to tell you."

She gazed at him with anxious eyes, and caught her breath deeply in a sigh that was half a sob.

"I have good news for you, Miss Laurison, news that I hope will set your mind at rest for ever."

"How can it be good when——?" she began.

"You were clever enough to—shoot a dead man."

"A dead man!" she repeated in astonishment. "How could I have done that?"

"It is an old trick in the East. I don't think such a

thing could happen in England. If you remember, the old grandfather sweeper, we were told, was dying when we arrived at the Rest House. We heard the tom-toms."

"They were going the next morning at intervals," she said.

"It is usual to continue them until the sick man is dead and buried."

"I thought they were beaten like that only for weddings."

"For deaths as well as weddings, but the death drums have a different beat."

She looked at him with a sudden doubt. Was he talking of tom-toms to lead her from the subject?

"I don't understand what happened."

"The man was dead when you put a bullet into him."

"You are certain the man was dead?"

"Positive."

"You are not deceiving me out of kindness, Moodaliyar?" she cried, a pathetic note of appeal in her voice that touched him.

"I assure you that the old man was dead."

"He must have been alive when I fired. I can't otherwise understand the movement that I saw, the lifting of the head."

"That was done by the aid of a rope that was fastened round his neck by those two scamps, the son

and grandson. They were hiding in the jungle waiting for you to fire."

"How did the old man get there?"

"They brought the corpse before you arrived at the hut, for the express purpose of allowing you to put a bullet through it."

"And the screaming and groaning?"

"The grandson did it. Didn't it strike you, at the time, that for an old man the voice was very strong?"

"It was loud enough to terrify me; nothing less."

The Moodaliyar smiled as he said:

"They seem to have staged the affair rather well. You were completely deceived I am sorry to say."

"Wasn't Bihoma deceived also?" she asked.

"The old man was very suspicious, but he did not think they would dare to play you such a trick."

"It is extraordinary and difficult to believe. I never heard of such desecration of the dead."

"I have," he replied. "We had a similar case seven or eight years ago at another village where they wanted to get an unpopular man into trouble."

"What was their object in this case?"

"They imagined that they could get money out of you; compensation. Somehow, the impression had gone abroad in the village that you were a very wealthy English princess." He did not add the rest of the rumour. "It was too good an opportunity to be lost. You would, of course, have paid whatever the scoundrels

asked if it had not been for Bihoma. They valued the old sweeper at ten rupees, a modest sum for an ancestor; but quite sufficient to cover the cost of a handsome funeral feast."

"How did you find all this out?"

"I suspected it from the very first but I was afraid to raise your hopes lest I might have to disappoint you. It was the movement that was so puzzling. If you remember I questioned you closely about it. You were quite right in your description. They actually dragged the corpse a foot and a half but they dared not bring it out of the shadow of the tree."

"I think it puzzled Bihoma as well. He saw it move."

"He did and he gave me exactly the same story as you did."

"And he lifted his hand to stop my shooting?"

"That was his object, because he thought the old man was alive." Then seeing the anxiety in her eyes he added: "But he was dead. That we ascertained for certain."

"How did you find out?"

"As soon as I heard Bihoma's account I drove to the nearest town and fetched the doctor. He said that the man died yesterday, in the afternoon, from natural causes, fever and old age. He gave me a certificate accordingly. The bullet wound was made some hours after death. The burial took place this afternoon."

"Am I to give them any money?"

"Most decidedly not! You will be aiding and abetting them in obtaining money under false pretences if you do."

"Poor things!" she said. She could not help feeling just a little pity for their disappointment, although their crime really deserved some sort of punishment.

"You might well say 'poor things'! not for their disappointment but for the fear I put into them. I threatened them with the police and a heavy fine. They were terrified and implored me to let them off, which of course I did, after giving them a severe fright."

Pauline drew a deep breath of relief as he again assured her that everything was in order and that no crime rested on her conscience.

"I don't know how to thank you, Moodaliyar, for all you have done. I have had a very bad day."

"You couldn't sleep?"

"Not a wink. But I shall sleep all right to-night. You have brought me blessed peace."

"And we promise not to tell tales of you," he said in a lighter tone. "How you went out big game shooting and bagged a fine old grandfather sweeper."

The smile that had been banished from her lips, returned.

"I deserve anything and everything you like to say about me. But it will have been my last shot. I shall never handle a gun again."

The Moodaliyar would not allow it for a minute. Of

course she would shoot again and she would forget all about this unfortunate incident.

"You will get your Ceylon leopard unless I am very much mistaken. Bihoma is much impressed with your skill. He assured me more than once I had never sent him a gentleman who shot better."

She turned to him in her seat and laid her hand on his as it rested on the arm of his chair.

"Moodaliyar! You have been a real good friend just when I wanted one, too. I am very grateful."

Her gratitude came from her heart and rang true. As she spoke her fingers closed over his. Her touch, cool and firm, startled him. It surprised him into saying:

"I am glad. I wish it was my lot to be something more than a friend."

"You and I must not hope to be anything else but friends," was her reply, given with a softening of the voice which, however, did not deceive him.

He lifted her hand to his lips. He recognised the wisdom of her words. He had a duty towards his own race and nation that entailed insuperable obligations. He intended to fulfil them, but the task was becoming a little harder than he anticipated.

Rising abruptly he left her. He did not appear again that evening. No apology was made for his absence and his name was not mentioned as she dined with the two dear ladies whose kindness nothing could exceed

and whose joy at the prospect of her departure was difficult to hide.

The following morning, early, the big car came to the portico. Rahman was at the wheel. He delivered a little note to her in which the Moodaliyar bade her farewell and wished her a safe journey home. It was his thoughtfulness that saved her from the necessity of repeating her thanks. He was a wonderful man, with the instincts of his ancestors the old Kandian kings.

Pauline was to pick up her luggage at Kandy and go down to Colombo the following day to wait for the Burma homeward mail.

Miss Capell and her Excellency watched the car as it turned out of the gateway of the grounds and disappeared.

"And now, Miss Capell," said the Moodaliyar's mother with a happy smile. "We must hurry on with the preparations for the wedding. The sooner it takes place the better." Miss Capell heartily concurred.

A YEAR passed. The rains of autumn, the fine cool days of January and February followed in succession. Then the Ceylon sun gathered strength and March came in with its dry season of heat and dust in the low country and its blossoming time up-country in the hills.

It was the middle of March. Lionel Prince had run up to Newara Eliya for a couple of nights at the Club. He was in the smoking-room studying the home papers that had come in by the last mail. An old friend entered and greeted him warmly. Men were always glad to meet Prince.

"Hallo! what are you looking for, Prince?" he asked.

"Advertisements of dogs for sale. Plenty of greyhounds on the market but they won't suit me."

"Want to buy some?"

"I've just lost my last seizer. Got on to an old boar and ran in game to the last. Before I could use my knife or the kennelman his spear, the brute had ripped up poor Hector beyond repair."

"That's the big boarhound, isn't it?"

"Yes, I've had him six or seven years and he has done me yeoman's service. I was fond of the hound."

He might have said the same of the rest for he knew each one individually and loved them all.

"How is the rest of the pack?"

"Weak; they want fresh blood."

"Have you tried India?"

"They can let me have two or three couple from Ooty, but they are not young enough for my purpose. I can train anything that has pluck and endurance but it must be young."

"You will have to run home this summer and see what you can do there. We shall all benefit by it. Your hunts are something to live for," said the other.

He spoke the truth. Men in the remote parts of the district still welcomed the post card that summoned them to Dolna for the week-end.

"I am afraid I can't fill up as I should like unless I go to England; not that England has any attraction for me," he added indifferently.

His friend glanced after him sympathetically as he moved away in the direction of the smoking-room. Although Prince was still full of nervous energy, he had lost the joyousness that other men used to find infectious. The very atmosphere of the Dolna bungalow was formerly permeated with it. Depression and bad spirits had vanished like morning mists before the sun, when they had come into contact with Dolna's master. But lately men had been conscious that the mental

atmosphere had changed and the joyousness had gone.

It was well known how Prince had suffered in his unfortunate love affair. Most people were of the opinion that the rupture between the lovers was of the nature of a storm in a teacup. They admitted that the offence given was serious; but it was pardonable, if due apology was offered, and ignorance of the laws of sport was pleaded. Anyway, it should never have been allowed to bring about a breach.

There was an inclination to blame Mrs. Macdonald for not having intervened as a mutual friend and exerted herself to bring them together again.

But no one was aware of the unfortunate little bit of news that, for what seemed an excellent reason, she had passed on to Prince. Pauline had gone on a visit to the Moodaliyar.

As soon as she had mentioned the fact her instinct told her that she had made a mistake; but once done it could not be undone, no matter what the consequences were. She consoled herself with the thought that it would have come to his ears sooner or later through someone else if not through herself.

She was not aware of how deeply he took it to heart, nor how angry it made him to think that Pauline could go on amusing herself under the circumstances and seek for consolation in the companionship of the Cingalese. Prince was hyper-sensitive, of course, and

deeply wounded by everything that had occurred. Time, the great healer, had not been given an opportunity of mending matters.

A few days after he had heard of Pauline's visit to Hondara, Prince was looking through the lists of passengers homeward bound, published in the Ceylon daily paper. He read Pauline's name. It startled him. He had made so sure that she was with the Moodaliyar and would not be returning to England for some weeks, perhaps months. She would sacrifice anything for the sake of a shoot; go trips with him into the low country; perhaps allow him to accompany her to Burma to kill a tiger on foot.

Prince, just and generous even in his soreness, did not believe that there was anything deeper in her designs than this craze for killing big game. Nevertheless it irritated him to think that she should accept favours from a Cingalese. He would have felt the same if the Moodaliyar had been an Englishman.

When he found that Pauline's visit must have been of the shortest description, the cloud that sat so heavily upon him lifted. He went to Glendee to have another chat with Mrs. Macdonald.

In the calmer moments that followed the news of Pauline's departure, he was able to contemplate the circumstances more temperately. He remembered the conversation on board ship about the waterhole shooting, and that she had expressed regret that she could

not accept the Moodaliyar's offer to give her a couple of nights at a good pool on his estate.

He questioned Mrs. Macdonald on the subject of the invitation. Did she think it was possible that Pauline had gone to pay a visit to a man who had no lady at the head of his establishment. She reminded him of the existence of her Excellency. The Cingalese lady lived by herself with Miss Capell. It was to her that Pauline would go.

Mrs. Macdonald, in justice to Pauline, was anxious to assure Prince that however keen she might be on shooting, she was not in the least likely to transgress the laws of her birth and breeding by placing herself in an equivocal position.

Prince listened and acquiesced, but the visit to the Moodaliyar was not the main grievance. The offence that had caused the rupture was committed in the forests where she had broken the law of sport.

He, like Pauline, allowed sport to dominate love. He had yet to find out by experience if he was right.

Thinking it over afterwards Mrs. Macdonald wondered if she could have healed the breach by pleading for Pauline's forgiveness. If Prince had been ten years younger, with something of the boy left in him, she would not have hesitated.

But there was nothing of the boy about this seasoned planter. He was a man of strong character with whom no one dared to take liberties. Had she ventured to

plead, she would not have been successful. It was all too fresh in his memory. In the heat of his anger he believed that love was dead, that he had no affection left for a woman who could deliberately hurt and offend him as she had done. Again, he had to find out by experience if he was right.

The weeks grew into months and the lesson came. He discovered that ove is not an emotion that can be swept out of a man's path at his will. It came back upon him in gusts that buffeted him and made him cry out in his loneliness for the woman to whom he had given his heart for all time. In memory she came to him when he least expected her. Sometimes it seemed as though she opened her arms and drew his head upon her firm breast where he could feel the throb of her heart. At other times he felt her hands touching him as her cheek lay against his.

It was maddening.

He tried to forget his trouble in hard work and strenuous play; hunting in the jungle; tennis at the club; a house full of friends for whom he could not do enough.

Burton found him at times a hard taskmaster; but he was teaching the young tea-planter in such a way that would ensure success. With it all nothing could exceed his kindness and generosity to his assistant, nor his fatherly goodness to the girl who had linked her fate with Burton's.

In the hunting field, the limitless forest of the mountains, his friends vowed that his energy with the hounds was killing. He worked everyone to death, sparing no one; field, kennelman, hounds nor himself. It was all foot-work over the stiffest ground that could be found anywhere.

Nothing daunted him; nothing exhausted him. No amount of physical exertion tamed his storm-ridden temperament.

Most men understood and were sorry for him. They agreed that he ought to leave Dolna for a time; otherwise he would have a breakdown sooner or later. England was the place where he could best shake off the trouble. At the back of their minds was the hope that perhaps a kind Providence might bring the two lovers together again or throw him into the arms of another. No one ventured to say as much to him, but by common consent they caught at any excuse to urge him to take the trip home.

Burton was quite capable of running the estate during the slack season of the hot weather. With an occasional supervising visit from his father-in-law he could carry on by himself. Fluffie was still in the blissful enthusiasm of her honeymoon and would make life pleasant for him. There was so much to be done to the new bungalow, the garden to be laid out, the tennis courts to be made and a good road that would take a rickshaw or a motor cycle.

It was not the counsel of friends but the loss of the seizers that turned the scales in favour of the journey home. However strong the pack might be—by this time it was lamentably weak—the hounds could not do the work without the assistance of the long-dogs. The stags broke bay over and over again for want of the seizers to hold them till the huntsmen could come up to give the coup-de-grâce.

As soon as the stag recovered its wind, it pushed the hounds aside with hoof and horn and bounded away. Or it leaped clean over them as they circled round in frantic tonguing, and made for the low country. In the swampy rice fields and sugar plantations the hounds were thrown off. They lost the scent and were unable to pick it up again without the help of the huntsmen.

The villagers caught the exhausted hounds and shut them up, hoping to be able to use them in hunts of their own, where the sambur were speared or beaten to death with loaded sticks. Hinds and fawns were the quarry. The meat was more valued for the curry pot than that of the stags.

Prince went one afternoon to see Mrs. Macdonald to say good-bye. He found her alone.

"My husband has gone down to the club," she said, thinking that he had come to talk over estate matters. She was aware that Macdonald had promised to keep his eye on Burton during his chief's absence.

"My visit is to you," he said with a touch of abruptness.

"How soon are you off?"

"In a week's time."

"Harry and Fluffie will miss you. You have been so good to them."

"I am sorry to leave, but I must go to buy some new hounds and long-dogs as well. They can only be got in England."

"Fluffie told me that you had been having very bad luck lately."

"I have lost half of them. The few that are left I dare not take out lest I should lose the lot."

She was aware that this was the true reason for his trip home. She would have been glad to think that there was an ulterior motive behind. As her eyes rested on him pity crept into her heart. He had altered much in the year. It was twelve months since Pauline had left Ceylon, but Prince was looking ten years older. Lines had appeared under his eyes that should not have been there; but what touched her most was the sad look in those deepset eyes that betrayed the suffering he had gone through.

He would not admit it, but he had already learned that love is stronger than sport; and to attempt to combat it and turn it out is beyond the power of the human being. Poor boy! was her thought. She wished she could help him.

"Where are you going to stay in England?" she asked. "You are leaving your address with my husband?"

"The same old place: the Badminton Club. It will find me wherever I am. I shall arrive in the middle of April and leave in September, bringing the hounds with me."

"If you can get them," she observed.

"There should be no difficulty at that time of the year."

"You will do a theatre or two?"

"No attraction at my time of life."

"Don't say that! One is never too old to go to the theatre. You will look up some friends, I hope, for your own good as well as theirs."

"If I have time; but I shall be hunting for hounds all the time. I may have to go to Ireland and certainly to Scotland for the long-dogs."

"If you see our old friends the Dennisons—they are living in town and he belongs to the Badminton—give them my love. They will be interested to hear that my little bird has flown so soon and has made a nest for herself on your estate."

He promised to deliver her message if he had the opportunity.

"Another old friend you ought to look up is Mr. Grant. He was a loss to the district when he went. I wonder if he has really retired."

"He hasn't sold his estate," said Prince. "He might come back any time if he thought the place wasn't being worked properly."

He spoke indifferently; yet he and Grant, a bachelor like himself, had been at one time great friends, both being keen huntsmen.

"Mr. Grant was much attached to the Island," remarked Mrs. Macdonald. "Ceylon gets round one's heart in an extraordinary way. It will draw you back I am sure."

"Most certainly!" he responded, warmly. "I have no inducement to settle in England and become a club man like Grant. All my interests are here; the estate, the hounds, the garden. If it were not for having to buy new hounds I should remain here."

While this rather desultory conversation was in progress, Mrs. Macdonald had been trying to find a favourable opening to say something that was on her mind. It required a little courage. It would not fail her if the opportunity came. It was now or never, as it was improbable that she would see him again.

"You are not likely to meet Pauline Laurison, I suppose."

It was out now, whether he liked it or not. His voice hardened and a grim smile hovered about his lips as he replied:

"Nothing is more unlikely. She is the very last person I wish to see. I wouldn't cross the road to speak to her."

Mrs. Macdonald was slightly shocked by his words. She believed and hoped that time had softened the edges of his anger, and was surprised to find that he was apparently as resentful as ever. She was cherishing a hope that if only they could be brought together their love would conquer everything that had gone before. His tone killed every bit of that hope.

"Mr. Prince!" she cried sharply. "You are unnecessarily harsh and bitter. I am sorry I mentioned her name."

"Bitter!" he repeated scornfully. "What do you expect me to be? I admit that I am bitter and I am justified in being what you call harsh. I have to thank her for spoiling my life. I wish to Heaven that I had never met her!"

"You are wrong! utterly mistaken!" cried Mrs. Macdonald distressed. "She was a dear! One in a thousand! we all loved her!"

"So did I, to my sorrow!" he replied between his teeth.

"I wonder if Pauline says the same about you."

"It is quite immaterial to me what she says and thinks. You must not suppose for a moment that I have any intention of looking her up. All that is over completely. It is well for us both that we found out before it was too late that marriage was impossible."

She had taken her courage in both hands and dared

to speak out. Prince was to get it at last straight from the shoulder. She did not intend to spare him.

"Marriage impossible! Rubbish! my dear man! You may say so, but you will not persuade me that you really believe it. She was the wife for you; the one woman in the world; and you let her slip through your fingers. I have never ceased to regret that you allowed so small a matter to drive you two apart."

"Small! do you call it?" he asked in some surprise.

"Yes, and paltry! One stag! A dozen stags wouldn't be worth quarrelling over."

"It wasn't the stag; it was the principle of the thing," he said rather lamely.

"Principle? There's no principle in love!" said Mrs. Macdonald.

"There is in sport."

"This was a case of love; not of sport. And after all what is sport compared with love?" she asked quickly.

"I am beginning to wonder," he replied sadly.

"You may well say that! Love conquers all the world over!" she cried.

He was wise enough to let her have the last word. Rising he held out his hand.

"Good-bye, Mrs. Macdonald. I am going home free and I am coming back free," he said with a smile in which there was more sadness than mirth.

He went on to the district club to say farewell to whatever friends he might find there. Mrs. Macdonald's

words rang in his ears. He had heard nothing like them since Pauline left, and he could not forget them. "A dear!" "One in a thousand!" "The one woman in the world!"

Then it occurred to him to wonder if Pauline's life was spoilt as his had been. It had never struck him that she might have been as miserable as himself over the rupture. He thrust the thought aside. If she had cared two straws for him, he asked himself, would she have ruined his hunt?

"What is sport compared with love?" Mrs. Macdonald had asked.

A dangerous pursuit where a woman had made a fetish of it. Killing a tiger had completely turned her head. She had killed everything in her world; love, friendship, consideration for others. She lived for sport, and the pursuit had made her heartless and selfish.

He had put her outside his life and he promised himself that she should never enter it again.

PRINCE lost no time in pursuing the object for which he had taken the journey home. He paid visits to two or three well-known hunt kennels and drew a blank. The huntsman at the last one visited was interested in Prince's account of his pack and the hunting of the sambur in the forests. He recommended him to go to a dog-breeder for what he wanted. Being of a practical nature he not only gave him advice but wrote down two or three addresses of men who might be of use.

Prince returned to the Badminton Club where he was putting up. The following morning, after breakfast, he again studied the advertisements in the club papers. His eye was caught by a few lines in one of them.

"A pair of English-bred boarhounds for sale. Apply Hopkins' Kennels, Newmarket."

He referred to the list the huntsman had given him and found the name of Hopkins. Newmarket was in the Eastern counties some distance from town. It would entail a long day's journey but he must take it. It was of no use to write. He must see the long-dogs before he bought them. He had better go the next day. It would not be wise to delay looking at them.

He was already coming to the conclusion that he would have some difficulty in picking up what he wanted; more so than formerly. So far he had seen nothing good or bad in the way of suitable hounds for a mixed pack in the colonies. Many of the hunts had not kept their foxhounds up to the mark. The packs had been let down during and after the war. And now the death-dues were seriously affecting sport, both shooting and hunting. The revenues were seriously crippled of those men whose fathers and grandfathers had hunted hounds and given the packs generous support. However much they might be devoted to the sport, they had no longer the means to follow it.

The fashionable dog of the moment was the grey hound. All breeders alike were specialising in them. These were of no use to Prince. They run by sight and not by scent and they are not of a sufficiently strong build to stand jungle work. Nor have they weight or courage enough to tackle a sambur, an animal as big as a thirteen hand pony.

At one of the kennels he had the offer of two couple of foxhounds but they were aged and utterly unfit for exportation. He must have the hounds in the full flush of their youth.

He looked up trains and the next morning saw him off early to Newmarket. As everyone knows, Newmarket is a great racing centre, hectic and feverish when the

races are on; dull and depressing when racing is off as it was on the occasion of Prince's visit.

He was not in search of excitement, however, nor of amusement. If he had wanted amusement he would not have sought it by taking part in the "sport of Kings".

As he descended from the train and glanced round at the dull, flat landscape with its sheds and platforms, his spirits fell and he prepared himself for disappointment. This dog-breeder was probably a horse-dealer who kept half a dozen dogs as a small "side-line". His suspicion was strengthened when he found that the first two or three men, of whom he inquired, did not know the name. He had better luck with a fourth man employed in the parcels' department.

Hopkins's Kennels he learnt were twenty minutes walk from the station. The porter put him on the road and gave him directions how to find his way. The place had once been a farm. Every building had been converted into either kennels for dogs or fowl houses for rearing chickens.

The few grass fields that were still attached to the buildings were used for exercising the dogs or they were wired off for fowl-runs. It was a compact group of neat, well-built outhouses with a good farm house as a centre. Mr. Hopkins, he decided, must be doing a flourishing business. If that was the case the man would be able to procure what he wanted even

if he did not happen to have the hounds on the place.

Prince opened a wicket gate and passed through a garden of the old-fashioned type to be found in front of most East Anglian farmhouses. The borders were stuffed with daffodils, early tulips, and wall flowers, a pleasant sight for an exile from the tropics. The path led to a door labelled office. He knocked and it was opened by a boy.

"I want to see Mr. Hopkins," he said.

"Mr. Hopkins is out there along of the dorgs, sir," was the reply.

"I've come about two boarhounds that he has for sale."

"That's right, sir; Boris and Sonia, two beauties," added the boy, mindful of the master's interests.

"Can I see them?"

'Yes, sir. I'll fetch them and I'll call Mr. Hopkins. He's on the t'other side of the middar (meadow). Will you please come in and set down sir."

Prince entered a neat, trim little office with a long diamond paned window overlooking a green stretch of turf called by the boy, the middar. There was an office table and two or three chairs. It had probably once been the keeping-room where the farmer sat at ease after his work was done.

He was about to seat himself when he was attracted by the sight of a capacious dog-basket placed in a spot

of sunlight near the window. He went to it and turned back a white linen coverlet. Half buried in a bundle of sweet hay was a little fox-terrier mother with two newly born puppies. They were blind and she was still weak from her recent maternal effort. She wagged her short tail but did not attempt to rise. He patted her gently and covered her again.

"Good little mother!" he said. "Only two babies left; quite enough for you to bring up. Go to sleep again. I'm a friend, not an enemy. No need to bark at me."

While he was stooping over the dog, talking to her and tucking in the cover so that she could breathe with comfort, the door opened behind him to allow—as he thought—Mr. Hopkins to enter.

Prince straightened himself up and turned to meet the dog-dealer with a word of approval for the dainty occupant of the basket.

To his astonishment he found himself confronted by, according to his declaration to Mrs. Macdonald, the very last person he wished to see; someone he would not cross the road to speak to!

"*Lionel!*"

"*Pauline!*"

In another second the totally unexpected happened. They were in each other's arms. Not a word more was spoken. Their lips met eagerly, thirstily.

Presently they drew apart. That office boy! He

would be back directly, bringing the boarhounds for inspection, with Mr. Hopkins in attendance. Prince retained his grip on her arm as though, having found her, he dared not let her go lest he should lose her again.

"There!" he ejaculated. "I feel better!"

"Same here!" responded Pauline, the colour flooding her face.

"We've been a couple of fools!"

"Rather!"

"We've wasted a whole year!"

"My mistake!" she said.

"No, mine!" he replied. "All mine!"

She glanced out of the window. The boy with Mr. Hopkins and two excited boarhounds were in the distance. She turned to Prince again. His arms closed round her.

"Will you forgive me?" she said.

He showed her again what a spirit of forgiveness filled his heart!

"It is you who must forgive," he said, wasting no more time in words. It was an occasion for deeds, not words.

They were interrupted by the opening of the door opposite to that labelled, office.

"Miss Vivyan!" exclaimed Prince. This was a second surprise.

She was carrying a novel. The last chapters were

securely fastened with a clip. It was open when she entered. She closed it and tucked it under her arm by way of frustrating any temptation she might feel to keep her eyes on the fascinating page. With a visitor of the importance of Prince it was necessary to detach her mind from the thrills of fiction.

"Where have you sprung from, Mr. Prince?" she asked, shaking hands with him warmly.

"Ceylon; I landed ten days ago."

"Had a good voyage home?"

"Excellent. I came by one of the Burma boats."

"Who gave you our address may I ask?"

"No one; I came to see Hopkins about two boarhounds he advertised for sale."

He was a little surprised by her inquisitorial tone and did not know what to make of it. He was going to ask for an explanation when she turned to Pauline and said:

"There! Didn't I say you were asking for trouble by advertising, Pauline? It is most provoking."

"What is provoking?" he asked, puzzled by her words. From his own point of view the miraculous had occurred. Nothing could be happier or more to his advantage as well as Pauline's. He looked at her for an explanation, but Pauline gave him no help. She began to laugh. It was a laugh of sheer happiness. Miss Vivyan continued yet more severely:

"I was afraid if we advertised or went into the

publicity line this would happen. The hero always turns up in the last chapter to carry off the heroine. He'll do it in this book." She took the volume from under her arm and flourished it in his face. "I have just read a description of how he has been left for dead in an old disused mill. He'll be found and in the last chapter he and the girl will be married."

"Quite right and proper, Miss Vivyan. You'd be disappointed if it didn't come off," replied Prince, joining in Pauline's laugh.

"Of course I should!" said Miss Vivyan. "But Pauline is not in a book and I can't spare her. You don't know what a dear she is!"

It was just what Mrs. Macdonald had said and now he was quite ready to agree. At this moment they were interrupted by the arrival of the boy from the yard with the two boarhounds that were pulling him off his feet. He was closely followed by an elderly man. Pauline introduced him.

"This is Mr. Hopkins, formerly my father's head groom. He lends me his name and his expert knowledge and I finance him with the kennels."

"We're partners, sir," explained Hopkins, beaming with pride and gratification. "Miss and me, we're partners."

"And he is obliging enough to lend me his name and advice also," said Miss Vivyan. "We run the chicken farm together."

"Partners again, sir. The other miss and me."

Their attention was claimed by Boris and Sonia, two cheerful, boisterous creatures that seemed to know by instinct that their imprisonment on the farm was to come to an end.

Prince was pleased with them and bought them on the spot. He asked if Hopkins had any others, fox-hounds or deerhounds that might suit him. At Pauline's direction Hopkins took the visitor to the kennels to let him look over them for himself. There might be other dogs over which they could come to terms.

"I'll go and see about tea," said Miss Vivyan. "Mr. Prince will be glad of some after walking round the place. Hopkins won't let him off a single dog."

She was longing to get away by herself to continue the story. The poor man must positively be rescued from the mill—but how?

Mr. and Mrs. Hopkins occupied the house and ran it. Pauline and her friend had taken two bedrooms and a sitting-room. Mrs. Hopkins "did" for them and made them very comfortable; so much so that Miss Vivyan regarded the probable rupture of the arrangement with something like dismay.

They had been together for eight months and had succeeded with the aid of Hopkins in establishing a nice little business that was beginning to be independent of all outside help. The man had gone in previously for breeding greyhounds just at the time when the craze

for racing had seized the sporting world. He was glad of the backing Pauline was able to give him. She did little of the practical work but it was her money on which it had been built up. She had looked after the puppies and the invalids that required hospital attention. She exercised the dogs, a duty that Mr. Hopkins was apt to regard as a waste of his time when he was called upon to do it.

Pauline remained in the office. She watched the two men as they walked round the premises, disappearing into the outhouses and reappearing at intervals. As her eyes rested on the familiar form she could scarcely believe that it was not a dream. Prince was a little thinner but as upright as ever, alert and quick in his movements with the old decision of manner.

And how glad she was to see him again! Only now did she realise how much she had missed him and how she had craved for a sight of him, for the sound of his voice.

"Tea is ready, Pauline," said Miss Vivyan. "You had better come to the sitting-room. I have told Mrs. Hopkins to ask Mr. Prince to join us there."

Pauline rose at her bidding.

"Elizabeth, this has been a tremendous surprise," she said. "Did you write and tell him I was here?" she asked with sudden suspicion.

"I did not," replied Miss Vivyan emphatically. "That's not the way things are done. Properly speak-

ing he should have rescued you from a mad bull or from drowning or from a kidnapping villain. Unfortunately those sort of things don't happen in East Anglia so there you are! It had to be an advertisement; a poor sort of coincidence. If I found that in a book I should say here's a fathead of an author! No imagination and I should cross him or her off the list at once."

"After all it has its romantic side," remarked Pauline.

"Romantic side! indeed! I call it a downright nuisance his turning up like this. It upsets our apple-cart for good and all."

Here Prince made his entrance. He, too, had a difficulty in believing in his good luck. The hounds had become of small importance compared with this marvellous recovery of Pauline. In spite of his tirade in Mrs. Macdonald's drawing-room, before leaving Ceylon, against the woman whom he would never forgive for spoiling his life, here he was at her feet more devoted than ever. A dozen stags might fall to her rifle for all he cared. He had found her again and he intended to make very sure that nothing came between them.

"Hopkins is just the man I want as an agent," he said as he took a seat near the table. "He says he can get me deerhounds and foxhounds, as many as I want. What is still more important, he can keep me supplied after I get back to Ceylon."

"You may depend on him to do his best," replied Pauline, pleased to hear praise of her father's old servant.

Miss Vivyan laid aside her book in spite of the fact that the hero was still imprisoned in the mill. She poured out the tea and handed hot buttered scones and cakes to her visitor. Pauline was too much in the clouds to be of practical use. Her chum, well-read in the lore of love, showed no surprise. She adapted herself to the occasion and did the honours of the tea-table.

As soon as her duties were over Elizabeth excused herself. She knew that she would not be wanted as a chaperone. The lovers, by all precedent, should now be left to explain why they quarrelled, to blame themselves and pray for each other's pardon. After which the reconciliation would be ratified by suitable love-making. It was all very tiresome in real life but it was inevitable. In her own interests she would have preferred it in a novel.

She drew a deep sigh and retired to a sheltered seat in the garden where she would be free from interruption. She hoped to have time to follow up the rescue of the hero and see him safely delivered from his perilous position before the rising of a storm which threatened to level the old mill to the ground. She looked at her watch. She could only give herself thirty minutes. At the end of half an hour she must close the book, as it would be time to feed her fowls, a duty never for-

gotten or put aside on any consideration whatever. It occupied an hour or more. After the chickens had been fed and shut up for the night, she would be able to return to her hero. She was anticipating a romantic meeting with the heroine and after the rescue marriage should loom large in the picture. Of course "the long arm of coincidence" would be required but what is the long arm intended for but as one of the most useful implements of the novelist to be worked for all it is worth?

As she withdrew, closing the door, Prince took Pauline by the arm and led her to a cosy corner from which they had a view of waving daffodils and gilly flowers.

"Now tell me about yourself, Pauline," he said, as he seated himself by her side with the old proprietary air. He was grateful to Miss Vivyan for her consideration, unaware that she found the fictional story far more engrossing than the untidy plot of real romance in which he and Pauline were figuring.

"Where shall I begin?" she asked.

"At the very beginning. Remember, I have heard absolutely nothing of you since you left the Island. I should not have been surprised to find that you had gone off to Africa to get a lion or two, or perhaps a rhino."

She shook her head as she gazed at him. He noted the absence of triumph in those eyes.

"Did you have good shooting with the Moodaliyar? You were not long at his house."

"Only forty-eight hours. I caught my ship at Colombo without any loss of time."

"So I saw by the passenger list. Was the shooting a wash-out? It isn't usually so with the Moodaliyar. He is noted for the good sport he gives his friends."

"I made a frightful mess of my waterhole shooting. He was extremely kind and did all he could. My mistake again."

It took some time to give him the history of her disastrous expedition. She confessed all and omitted nothing. He listened, full of sympathy.

"You poor darling!" he said more than once.

It was very comforting to be pitied.

"I began badly when I was with you and I ended with a catastrophe that shook my nerves to pieces. For the space of some hours—from one in the morning to six o'clock the next evening—I was overwhelmed with the conviction that I had taken the life of a human being. I was no better than a murderer. And I could not get away from that awful shriek and groan. They rang in my ears."

"Brutes!" ejaculated Prince. "They wanted horse-whipping! You hadn't experience enough to know that any creature with a bullet through its brain drops dead silently."

"Bihoma must have known, for he wouldn't let

me promise to give them any compensation," she said.

"And quite right, too. He was aware that it was an attempt to blackmail you. I hope the Moodaliyar took it up. You were his guest."

"I think he was very angry as well as annoyed that I should be treated in such a manner. He was extremely kind to me. I was sorry for him. It was really my fault."

"Your fault! I don't see how that could be" exclaimed Prince, who was not prepared in his supreme happiness to allow that she could be wrong in anything.

"It was my impatience, my haste to have my own way without consideration."

She explained again how all along she had seemed to be under control and guidance when she wanted a free hand. The consequences had proved disastrous whenever she had shown a spirit of rebellion.

"I wouldn't do as you told me, dearest, and look what misery I brought on you as well as myself. I refused to be guided by Bihoma and gave myself and the Moodaliyar a very anxious time. Lionel, dearest! You do forgive me, don't you?"

He reassured her in his own way, thankful to have had her restored to him on any terms.

"Better luck next time," he said. "Darling! you may kill all the stags you like with knife or rifle as you fancy."

"There won't be any next time," she replied a little sadly.

"Why, what do you mean, Pauline?"

"I have given up shooting entirely. No more sport for me!"

"Not even elk-hunting?"

"Not even your beloved jungle-fowl shooting. I have finished with it all, small game and big. You will have to go out without me."

"But why? why? The mistakes you made were due to inexperience and time cures that."

"My nerve is gone," she said. "I can't bear the sight of a rifle. I have not handled one since Bihoma took mine from me after I had fired the bullet that the old dead sweeper stopped."

He was full of sympathy and distressed to find that the old spirit of sport was knocked out of her. He remembered her pride in her rifles, in the death of the tiger, her anxiety to add leopard and sambur to her collection of trophies. It seemed incredible that it should all be so completely wrecked.

"And what are you going to do with yourself while I am hunting?" he asked.

"I shall look after the sick and wounded in the kennels."

There was silence, a silence that went far to heal their sore hearts.

"What made you take up dogs?" he asked presently.

"I felt that I must devote myself to something. I was so lonely and miserable, so full of regrets. I looked up old Hopkins and persuaded him to start the kennels with me. Horses were 'out' and greyhounds were 'in.' He had already begun in a small way. He jumped at it, delighted to be working under me again. We have done very well and I have picked up a lot of useful information which will come in very handy when we get back to Ceylon."

"Where did you run across Miss Vivyan?" he asked.

"She was on board the ship that brought me home. She had finished her visit to India and didn't want to go through the hot weather. We agreed to chum. She has done very well with her fowls."

"In spite of her devotion to novels?"

He was pleased to see a smile on Pauline's face. The history of her woes had depressed her.

"Those tales of crime and adventure are the breath of life to her. They keep her going. And now tell me about Dolna and the tea. Is it flourishing?"

This was a subject of inexhaustible interest. She hung upon his words and asked innumerable questions.

"Did you hear of the Moodaliyar's marriage?" he said.

"No; I am so glad. His mother must be delighted. You know that I stayed with her. She was kindness itself."

"She is very pleased," he said. "From all accounts his wife is everything that he could desire."

"She doesn't shoot or ride I imagine," remarked Pauline with a smile.

"I don't fancy that the Moodaliyar would like those accomplishments in a wife; do you?"

"I am sure that he would not," she replied.

His eyes dwelt upon her as he put the question. Her reply was free from self-consciousness and confusion. The last spark of jealousy died out of his heart. He was satisfied that she had been faithful to him and her thoughts had never wandered from her first and only love.

"He doesn't care for hunting nor shooting big game himself but he knows how to be kind and helpful to those who do."

"He is devoted to his stud farm and racing stable," said Prince. "He has done a great deal for Ceylon in that respect. The Colombo Club gave him a handsome wedding present with which he was pleased."

They went back again to Dolna and Glendee.

"You haven't asked after Fluffie," said Prince.

"How is she? Still engaged to Mr. Burton?"

"Married by this time."

"Married!" exclaimed Pauline. "I thought her mother had decreed a two years' engagement. The girl is very young."

"Young compared with old stagers like ourselves,"

replied Prince. "She is a little minx who knows how to get her own way. She bullied her mother into giving her consent; cried and moped till Mrs. Macdonald was afraid she would make herself ill."

"Were you at the wedding?"

"I kept away. I hadn't the heart for it."

"Have they settled at Dolna?"

"Yes, most comfortably, in the little bungalow which I built for Burton when I turned him out."

"To make room for me?" she said. "You ought to have been at the wedding."

"I couldn't do it," he replied. "And really I wasn't wanted. I have been a surly old beast since you left me, Pauline. My heart was broken."

"Over the loss of your stag?" she asked mischievously.

"No, you perverse woman! Over the loss of my bride."

They were silent for a while. It was not far from the hour when his train was due to start back to town. He had made no arrangements to stay the night in Newmarket, never dreaming that he would have occasion to wish to remain. A couple of hours he had imagined would be ample to conclude all the business he could have with the dog-breeder.

"I must be going soon, darling. You must drive me to the station. You won't run away again, will you?"

"You will find me here at any time," she replied. "This is all the home I have for the present."

"Pauline!" he cried as he held her in his arms. "There is nothing for us to wait for. Heaven knows that we have waited long enough. How soon, dearest, how soon?"

"As soon as you like," was the happy reply.

"Then I shall make arrangements accordingly. By George! I never expected that I should get a honeymoon into my holiday. My luck is in!"

"So is mine!"

* * * *

Miss Vivyan might be annoyed, but she would have to reconcile herself to losing her chum much sooner than she anticipated. In a fortnight's time she found herself acting as bridesmaid—although she would not allow the term to be used—to Pauline.

Hopkins reached the summit of his pride and delight when he was asked to give away his beloved old master's daughter. A breakfast was duly provided but Pauline did not stay for it. Prince took his bride straight away from the church door.

The quest for hounds was handed on to Hopkins and sport was for the time entirely forgotten.

October saw Mr. and Mrs. Lionel Prince on board ship eastward bound. They had with them a batch

of fine young foxhounds. More were to follow as soon as Hopkins could find exactly what his late partner and the gentleman wanted.

Gun-cases and cartridge-bags were not prominent among Pauline's luggage this time. They were conspicuous by their absence.

Miss Vivyan bade them farewell with a promise that they might see her in a year's time for a flying visit to Dolna. Mrs. Hopkins would take over the fowls at any time, if "the other miss" wished to give them up.

A cable was sent to Mrs. Macdonald with the news and it was received with joy. It was communicated to everyone in the district and discussed at the Club. It was decided to give Prince and his bride a great reception. Mrs. Macdonald offered her house.

Invitations were sent out calling on all friends to rally round them on arrival. The wedding was over, but the wedding breakfast could still be held. Prince wrote begging to be allowed to give it, as was originally arranged. He determined that there should be no disappointment about it this time. Mrs. Macdonald was asked to act for him and see that nothing was omitted to make it a record entertainment.

The bride and bridegroom arrived at Glendee between two and three o'clock in the afternoon. They were met with the joyous hearty welcome that seems to belong specially to colonials.

Mrs. Macdonald glanced at Pauline two or three

times with inquiry during the feast of cake and champagne and other good things. She was satisfied. Victory was on the side of love and she had no misgivings that the old bugbear, sport, would make mischief again.

The sun was not far from its setting when they set out for Dolna. Fluffie had transformed the bungalow into a veritable bower of roses and lilies, orchids and ferns.

Prince duly carried his bride over the threshold, but the two happy people returned to the veranda where they were left, with ringing cheers, to begin their life together in one of the Empire's most delectable colonies, the Lanka of the ancient East.

THE END